

*FIVE MASTERS OF
FRENCH ROMANCE*

By

ALBERT LÉON GUÉRARD



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FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

*Anatole France, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget,
Maurice Barrès, Romain Rolland. By*

ALBERT LÉON GUÉRARD

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ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION: FIRST AID TO THE ANGLO- SAXON READER OF FRENCH NOVELS.

PAGES

§1. SPIRIT AND SCOPE OF THIS BOOK - - 1-10

The French technique—Art for Art's Sake—Fic-
tion as a document on National Psychology.

§2. CRITIQUE OF FICTION AS A SOURCE OF HIS-
TORICAL DOCUMENTATION - - 10-20

The author's temperament—Literature is the self-
revelation of one class only—" Good " literature
not necessarily the most representative—Undue
prominence given to Parisian life.

§3. WHY FRANCE, LOTI, BOURGET, BARRÈS, ROLLAND,
WERE SELECTED - - - 20-25

§4. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND - 25-29

National discouragement, popular vitality.

§5. THE CONFLICT OF IDEALS - - - 29-35

Tradition—Beauty—Justice.

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER II.

ANATOLE FRANCE: BEFORE THE DREYFUS CASE.

	PAGES
§1. A GENERAL SURVEY OF ANATOLE FRANCE'S CAREER - - - - -	39-47
A personal glimpse—France's supremacy—The four periods in his career.	
§2. FORMATION AND FIRST PERIOD: GENTLE IRONY	48-65
Early surroundings—Education— <i>The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard</i> — <i>The Book of my Friend</i> .	
§3. SECOND PERIOD: VOLTAIRIAN IRONY, ART FOR ART'S SAKE - - - - -	66-77
France as a writer of short stories—France as a literary critic— <i>Thaïs</i> — <i>The Rôtisserie of Queen Pédaugue</i> — <i>The Red Lily</i> .	
§4. THE ETHICS OF THE AVERAGE SENSUAL MAN	77-90
Critique of all objective criteria—Tolerance and enlightenment—Hedonistic Sociability—Love and the morality of the eighteenth century.	

CHAPTER III.

ANATOLE FRANCE: THE DREYFUS CASE, AND AFTER.

§1. PROVINCIAL LIFE - - - - -	97-111
<i>The Elm on the Mall</i> —The Church of the Concordat—Abbé Lantaigne—Anatole France's Anticlericalism.	

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
§2. ANATOLE FRANCE AND THE DREYFUS CASE	111-121
Authority and Liberty— <i>The Dressmaker's Form— The Amethyst Ring—M. Bergeret in Paris.</i>	
§3. ANATOLE FRANCE AND SOCIALISM - -	121-129
<i>Towards a Better Age—On the White Stone.</i>	
DISCOURAGEMENT AND CYNICISM - -	129-133
<i>Penguin Island—The Gods are Athirst—The Revolt of the Angels.</i>	
§4. THE WAR—CONCLUSION - -	133-134
<i>On the Glorious Path.</i>	

CHAPTER IV.

PIERRE LOTI.

§1. EDUCATION - - - - -	139-146
Feminine influences—Protestantism—The sea.	
§2. LOTI'S NOVELS: 1879-1892 - - -	146-155
Exotic idylls— <i>My Brother Yves—The Iceland Fisherman—Madame Chrysanthemum.</i>	
§3. LOTI'S NOVELS: AFTER 1892 - -	156-164
<i>A Sailor—Ramuntcho—The Disenchanted—Mis- cellaneous works.</i>	
§4. THE ART AND THOUGHT OF PIERRE LOTI -	164-171
A lyrical painter—"Anguish" the key-note— Nature and love as refuge—"The Books of Pity and Death"—"Supreme Pity."	

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER V.

PAUL BOURGET.

	PAGES
§1. RATIONALISM AND TRADITION - -	177-188
Rationalism triumphant, before the Revolution; on the defensive thereafter—Taine's influence on Bourget and Barrès.	
§2. PAUL BOURGET AS A PSYCHOLOGIST -	189-198
Many-sided culture—The chronicler of Parisian elegance—Amiel's disease—"Un cochon triste."	
§3. PAUL BOURGET AS A MORALIST - -	198-211
<i>The Disciple</i> —The moral bankruptcy of science—Reconstruction of France on the basis of tradition—Catholicism, indissoluble, family, permanent classes—A retrospective Utopia.	

CHAPTER VI.

MAURICE BARRÈS.

§1. THE NOVELS OF MAURICE BARRÈS - -	216-234
(i.) "Ego-Worship": Analysis—Belated Baudelairianism. (ii.) Politics: Boulanger— <i>The Romance of National Energy</i> . (iii.) <i>The Uprooted</i> and Regionalism— <i>The Eastern Bastions</i> — <i>The Inspired Hill</i> .	
§2. THE DOCTRINE OF NATIONALISM IN MAURICE BARRÈS - - - -	234-248
The "soil and the dead"—"French truth" and "French justice"—The French Norm and the French Tradition—The three roots of patriotism: common interests, common traditions, common aspirations.	

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER VII.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

	PAGES
§1. ROMAIN ROLLAND'S CAREER - -	252-263
Rome—Music—The drama—Biographies— <i>Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine</i> .	
§2. "JEAN-CHRISTOPHE": THE FIRST FOUR VOLUMES - - - -	263-276
<i>Dawn—Morning—Adolescence—Rebellion.</i>	
§3. "JEAN-CHRISTOPHE": THE LAST SIX VOLUMES	276-284
<i>The Fair on the Market-Place—Antoinette—In the House—The Friends—The Burning Bush—The New Day.</i>	
§4. "JEAN-CHRISTOPHE": INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM - - - -	285-291
Strength and its failure—The techniques of <i>Jean-Christophe</i> — <i>Jean-Christophe</i> as an historical document—Franco-German reconciliation.	
POSTSCRIPT: "ABOVE THE STRIFE!" - -	291-296

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION: THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

§1. AFTER THE WAR: DECADENCE? - -	299-306
Geniuses as cannon-fodder and survival of the unfittest.	

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
§2. REGENERATION - - - -	306-312
Greater earnestness—Precedents of the Religious Wars and the Revolution.	
§3. UNITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE RESTORED. WHAT FRANCE MEANS TO THE WORLD -	312-318
INDEX - - - -	319-326

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FIRST AID
TO THE ANGLO-SAXON READER
OF FRENCH NOVELS

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION: FIRST AID TO THE ANGLO-SAXON READER OF FRENCH NOVELS.

§ I. SPIRIT AND SCOPE OF THIS BOOK.

The French technique—Art for Art's sake—Fiction as a document on National Psychology.

A YELLOW-BACK novel on the parlour table of an English-speaking family is a diploma of culture and daring, with a faint, not unpleasant, aroma of wickedness. Modern French fiction is a byword for sparkling audacity: it is the champagne of literature. In case anyone should have been enticed to pick up this volume by the bad reputation of the French novel, I beg to give notice at the outset that these studies will be neither sparkling nor wicked: both distinctions transcend my ambition or my ability. For one thing, I have perused, almost at a stretch, between two and three hundred novels, not including short stories; and I can assure my readers that sparkling wickedness, in such high doses, carries with it its antidote. One yellow-back

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

may be exciting and dangerous: three hundred have a sobering, nay, a saddening, effect, which a German colleague of mine described as "ein literarischer Katzenjammer." And there is a deeper reason. It is well for the heroes of Boccaccio to indulge in licentious tales a few leagues from a plague-stricken city: but I should despise my public and myself if we could find any pleasure in frivolities whilst millions of our brothers are being slaughtered on the altars of a monstrous idol. I do not expect frequently to allude to the European nightmare. But I know that it overshadows the thoughts of all right-minded men; and it leaves us in no tolerant mood for the spicy scandals of the Parisian life of yesterday.

But frivolity and seriousness are not inherent in the subject-matter itself. I have read books on the humour of mathematics; there are farcical sides even to theology, as Voltaire would be only too eager to testify; whilst a doctor might win his philosophical spurs with an historico-psychological treatise on the various breeds of Irish bulls. Whether the theme be in itself serious or not, it is always open for a writer to be dull, and for his readers to be bored. The

INTRODUCTION

surest method for attaining this double result is to deal with general ideas: a method whereof we shall freely avail ourselves. After an extensive survey of French fiction, individual plots and characters recede into the background. We become aware of certain universal traits, of certain broad issues. It is for the sake of these that the following essays were composed.

The most obvious of these traits is the artistic perfection of the average French novel, even in the hands of such little-known men as Elemir Bourges or Estaunié, or in those of others who, like Pierre Louÿs, are beneath contempt from the moral point of view. There is, in most of them, a restraint, a freedom from sheer sensationalism and sentimentalism, a clearness of composition, a smoothness in the development of a simple and logical plot, a seldom-failing tact of selective realism, which can hardly be matched anywhere. If I had to express the whole of these attributes in one word, I should say that French authors have the gift of *style*. Good or bad, wicked or edifying, the French novel that has any pretension to literature is visibly the work, not of an enthusiastic schoolgirl, not of a mere hack-writer, but of a craftsman who knows

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

and respects the laws of his art—a craftsman with a long, exacting tradition to sustain; with a special and intense training; with a formidable body of professional critics to face and a fastidious public to conquer. The result may not be great: perfection is not excellence. One might be tempted to say that it cannot be great, if greatness be inseparable from spontaneity; but it can hardly fail to be distinguished. In a country of raw, untutored strength, like America, where public opinion in literary matters is neither trained nor organized; where genuine criticism is absolutely drowned in a mass of paid advertisements; where educated people read and enjoy without blushing the lucubrations of Harold Bell Wright, the example of French technique might have a salutary influence. Not that I would for a moment advocate the writing of Parisian novels in the American dialect; but in literature as in city government, we might, without losing our national identity, train ourselves away from the haphazard and the shoddy, and learn the value of taste and care. And I am not so sure that, in this as in many other things, England might not profitably borrow a few leaves from the books of her friend and ally.

INTRODUCTION

This technical supremacy of the French novel will lead us to the discussion of a broader problem: art for art's sake. Should artistic perfection be the sole aim of the novel-writer? Should it be more than a means to an end, or, better still, the unconscious reward of higher striving, a flower plucked by the wayside in a sterner quest? Granted that beauty is truth, truth beauty—by which end shall we take hold of the problem? Is it possible for the novelist to be neutral in moral questions? Does not even photography imply selection, emphasis, and a personal point of view? Thus we shall be led to challenge the position of some of the greatest modern French masters—of Anatole France, for example. We shall see that pictorial, psychological, or musical witchery has often been used as a cloak for an appeal to the lower instincts; we shall see that there may be such a thing as æsthetic pharisaism, no less deadly than hypocritical prudishness. Of beauty might be said, as of religion, love, Reason, patriotism: "What crimes are committed in thy name!"

This will be our second step. The third will take us far beyond the moral quagmire of so

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

many works of fiction, and to much higher grounds. For those writers who, like France, Loti, Barrès, Bourget, have so often prostituted their unrivalled skill to the description of licentious scenes, are by no means thoughtless epicures. They are Frenchmen of the present day, with a thousand years of culture back of them, and, facing them, the most engrossing, the most tragic problems of modern life. Many contemporary French novels frankly belong to what is called in France "la littérature à thèse," and in this country "problem literature." This is emphatically true of Bourget's epoch-making *Disciple*, or of the last six works of Zola; it is no less true, albeit less obvious, in the case of *Colette Baudoche* or *The Disenchanted*. Problem fiction is open to severe criticism: but the other books, which simply purport to be truthful human documents, or, with still greater modesty, claim to be entertaining stories and nothing more, are steeped in ideas, and imply definite doctrines, a philosophy of life and of society: thus France's *Red Lily*, objective and detached though it may seem. The very scum of fiction may help us follow some eddy in the currents of French thought. Novels, more directly than any other

INTRODUCTION

form of literature, are documents on the psychology of the French people. And never has the commanding interest of such a study been more clearly revealed than at the present time. The causes of the Great War, its outcome and its results will ultimately be found to be problems of national psychology. The Allies are fighting, not a nation, but a state of mind. The Battle of the Marne, which wrung salvation out of disaster, was a spiritual rather than a material victory. Faith has offset forty-two centimetre guns, and steadiness of nerves is bound to win in the end. Had France been the dissolute and decadent nation that we chose to imagine some fifteen or twenty years ago, her spirit would have broken down, even before her armies, under the fierce onslaught of Germany. A French novel is a personally conducted trip to France; it offers us what Thomas Cook could not give at any price—an introduction to the home of French families, and a glimpse of the French soul. In these pages, therefore, my purpose will be to study, not so much Anatole France or Loti, Barrès, Bourget or Romain Rolland, but that entrancing and mysterious entity, France: France as a nation, picturesque, intensely individualized;

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

France also as the herald of humanity, the land where universal problems send their clearest note of challenge.

§ 2. CRITIQUE OF FICTION AS A SOURCE OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION.

The author's temperament—Literature is the self-revelation of one class only—"Good" literature not necessarily the most representative—Undue prominence given to Parisian life.

Half-knowledge is but ignorance worse confounded. A whirlwind trip to Paris has befuddled more Anglo-Saxons than it has enlightened; and the same danger threatens the hasty and superficial reader of French novels. If works of fiction are to be used as documents by the student of psychology and history, it must be with the utmost caution. Literature is the mirror of life; but it is a mirror which never embraces the whole of life and never is perfectly true.

We have first to make allowances for the personality of the writer. Zola himself, although he made extravagant claims of "scientific objectivity" for his own school, Naturalism, defined art as "nature seen through a temperament"

INTRODUCTION

—and we all know that the “temperament” of literary men is not a negligible quantity. The very fact of authorship is an abnormality, and writers are essentially misrepresentative men. A careful study of the letters and memoirs of famous authors reveals the fact that hardly a single one could be trusted about the simplest or the most important events in his own life. Literature is a magic veil which obliterates the sharp distinction between truth and fiction. It would be ridiculous to call novel writers in the lump professional liars; but they are professional illusionists. We have to measure, in each separate case, with what amount of salt their fiction must be taken.

The next fact to bear in mind is that literature is the self-revelation, not of the whole people—the age of folk-lore is past—but of those classes which are able to express themselves and care to do so. In any given generation, the majority, so far as literature is concerned, is dumb, and almost as deaf as it is dumb. It leaves no direct trace in literature. No genuine, unsophisticated peasant could give us a record of peasant life. A Burns, a Guillaumin, an Audoux, if you will pardon this jumble of names great and small,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

are no longer peasants, but conscious *littérateurs*, whose sensations, whose very recollections, are coloured by their acquired culture. And this huge mass is practically unaffected by literature: all the essentials of its existence—the daily task, the family, religion—are profoundly traditional, almost instinctive, and have hardly changed throughout the ages. Men educated in the artificial atmosphere of the cities often fail to realize the invincible conservatism of the rural classes in continental Europe. It was but yesterday that it dawned upon a village minister that German peasants had not yet been converted to Christianity.* This discovery was strikingly confirmed by recent events: but the same fact is true of continental Europe as a whole, and of Great Britain in part. The old gods are still worshipped in the guise of saints, or feared as goblins and demons. This immovable substratum seems to play a small part in national history as well as in literature: yet it is the constant reservoir of forces without which the self-devouring upper classes would soon cease to be. In national as well as in individual

* Paul Gerade, *Meine Beobachtungen und Erlebnisse als Dorfpastor*, 1896.

INTRODUCTION

psychology, the domain of the subconscious is by far the more extensive. Real France may be just the France that literature ignores, or cannot interpret from within.

It is true that a great change has come over the country in the course of the last fifty or sixty years. With manhood suffrage, conscription, cheap transportation, telegraphs, compulsory education and popular newspapers, the masses are waking up to cultural life. But, so far, they have not told us their secret. Their brightest minds have, in a sense, deserted their class, even when defending the democratic cause. They are not educated peasants or artisans: they are embryonic, and very soon full-fledged, *bourgeois*.

The *bourgeoisie* plays such an important part in the national life of France that we might be satisfied if that one class, at least, were faithfully portrayed in literature. Here we come upon another stumbling-block: what is literature? In every cultured nation, several thousand books or pamphlets are published every year: who could handle these tons of literary material? What survives as "literature" in the narrower sense—one book in a thousand, and, if we take periodicals into account, one page in a million

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

—is likely to represent, not an average, but an exception. If literature is intellectually far superior to the average level, it may also be morally inferior. Before drawing inferences from *The Flowers of Evil*, we must remember that there never were more than a handful of Frenchmen who enjoyed Baudelaire. And this is singularly true of the worst yellow-back novel, which may be defined as a cosmopolitan poison put up in Parisian bottles. Take the most widely circulated novels of Anatole France: France has readers all over the world; he has become almost a fetish; thousands buy his books out of sheer snobbishness, or because of the “truffles” with which his concoctions are flavoured, and which can be appreciated by others than high-brows. Yet, with all these advantages, his sales barely reach the 100,000 mark, with an average of 40,000. Now, the ordinary French peasant, working man, or even *petit bourgeois*, selects his paper and remains faithful to it chiefly on account of the serial stories—the only kind of literature he enjoys. Before the war, *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Petit Parisien* each claimed a paid circulation of over a million, and a circle of three to four million readers: claims which are

INTRODUCTION

staggering, but not absolutely preposterous when you think that in remote villages, one copy would suffice to go the slow round of all the farmhouses. A novel like *Les Deux Gosses** has from ten to twenty readers for one of Anatole France, and a hundred for one of Romain Rolland. Just one step higher than d'Ennery, Montépin or Decourcelles, there are in France authors who, like Hall Caine and Marie Corelli in England, have not given up all claims to literature. Their production is commercialized art, yet, in a sense, it is art. Such was Georges Ohnet, such is Henri Bordeaux. Now, whilst these honourable manufacturers are not spared by professional critics, they have a much larger public than the genuine artists. For the historian of manners, they are more "representative." And their literature is as edifying as any Sabbath-school book. Another example: *L'Abbé Constantin*, sweetish and unconvincing, might be printed in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and Aunt Priscilla would never turn a hair. The same author, Ludovic Halévy, wrote a little masterpiece of a kind not to be

* Dramatized in this country as *Two Little Vagabonds*. Has nothing to do with the fascinating autobiography *Father and Son*.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

encouraged, *La Famille Cardinal*, the very quintessence of Parisian wit and wickedness. *La Famille Cardinal* may survive as literature—on an upper shelf inaccessible to young ladies; *L'Abbé Constantin* will be forgotten, except in American colleges, where its easy style and unimpeachable sentimentality will long keep it a favourite. Yet which of the two is the more “ typical ” ?

I should like to carry the demonstration one step farther, and claim that literature may be not so much a picture of society as a protest against society, the complement as well as the mirror of life. Granted that we enjoy in Shakespeare those universal touches in which we recognize our own souls: do we not enjoy also, more obviously perhaps, the romance, the wild passions, the tragic events, the sovereign poetry *not* found in our own commonplace existence? Nothing could be more formal, colourless, lifeless, than the literature of the French Revolution and of the First Empire. But, under Louis-Philippe, the Citizen-King, the embodiment of safe and sane Philistinism, when “ *Enrichissez-vous!* ”* was the watchword and Common Sense the idol, then of all times bloomed the rankest romantic

* *Get rich!*

INTRODUCTION

literature, the blood and thunder drama of Victor Hugo, the passionate calls to rebellion of George Sand, the childish and entrancing prose epic of the elder Dumas, the earlier novels of Balzac, with their constant background of mystery and terror. In an age of dull comfort and peace without honour, the most adventurous souls found in the fantastic realms of literature a free scope for their pent-up energies. Twenty years earlier, it is on the battlefield that they would have satisfied their craving for action. This law of contrast holds good to the present day, in France and elsewhere. How many films describe the American life that we are familiar with? Is it *The Perils of Pauline* or *The Diamond from the Sky*? The word *law* is too ambitious: I am not offering a hard and fast theory: I am merely calling attention to one element in literature which should not be disregarded. Let us see how it works in the case of the modern French novel. One of the essential facts in French life is the so-called "marriage of convenience." Many irregularities which take place in real life are acts of rebellion, at times almost excusable, against a heartless and sordid system which disposes of human beings with

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

scant regard for their sentiments. These intrigues, so far as we can judge, are the exception, and no more prevalent than in other leading countries. French novels seem to give a different impression. The fondness of irreproachable husbands and wives for a literature which to us appears unduly spicy represents the craving for adventure, for romance, which they were denied in their own youth, and which they satisfy, innocently enough, in this vicarious way. Be it said without paradox, the heroes of fiction are scapegoats which take away the sins of Israel.

Literature is a distorting mirror; it gives caricatural prominence to one aspect of French life—the love affairs of the Parisian smart set. There are French novels of all kinds, it is true: historical romances like *Notre-Dame*, *Ninety-Three*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Salammbô*; stories portraying the life of all classes, of all provinces, of all countries under the sun; fairy tales, allegories, Utopias; Balzac and Zola have attempted to give us a synthetic picture of the whole of French society, from Court circles to the slums; and *Les Misérables* is a work truly encyclopædic in character. Yet the fact remains that, especially during the last thirty or forty years, Parisian

INTRODUCTION

“ high life ” has received an undue amount of attention on the part of novelists. We shall see in studying Bourget that there are some serious reasons for this narrowing down of the field of fiction. We shall at present mention only the most obvious. “ High life ” in Paris, whether on the Grands Boulevards, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain or in the newer districts colonized by the cosmopolitan aristocracy of finance, in its glittering *demi-monde* or in its world-famous Bohemia of arts and letters—“ high life ” in Paris, that modern Fairyland, has more glamour about it than any fabled Arcadia of the past. For the modest sum of three francs fifty, we are admitted for a few hours into the magic circle. Who could resist the temptation? Such a curiosity is morbid, I know; as morbid as that of the good people from Keokuk, Kalamazoo, and maybe even Texarcana, whose dollars, in ante-bellum days, were grist to the Moulin-Rouge. The student of French civilization should beware of conclusions hastily based on such one-sided documents. Three-fourths of the French novels may purport to chronicle the wickedness of some ten thousand “ Parisians,” many of whom were made in Germany: this does not imply that

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

thirty-nine million Frenchmen were living according to the gospel of Anatole France.

In other words, the image of society is subjected not to a mere refraction, but to sundry deformations through the medium of literature. It is our task to compute these "aberrations" as accurately as we can, and to restore the true image. Should we even partially succeed, we would have served, in a modest way, both history and literature. Not only shall we get a more trustworthy picture of French life, but we shall also gain a more thorough understanding of the writers themselves.

§ 3. WHY FRANCE, LOTI, BOURGET, BARRÈS, ROLLAND, WERE SELECTED.

I have selected, as typical of contemporary French fiction, the works of Anatole France, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget, Maurice Barrès, and Romain Rolland. Any such selection is open to challenge as arbitrary. I have not included in this list two of the most widely read among French novelists, René Bazin and Henry Bordeaux. Not that I wish to adopt the supercilious attitude of those critics for whom every

INTRODUCTION

pure and sane story is *ipso facto* conventional, mawkish, Philistine: there are books as unimpeachable as any of René Bazin's among the collected works of the five writers mentioned above. I may simply say that Bazin and Bordeaux, although distinguished and infinitely respectable, do not represent anything very definite in modern French literature. Zola's Naturalism is definite enough, and has played a tremendous part in the evolution of the novel. But it belongs to the past; at least it is undoubtedly a receding influence. So I have left out of account altogether the last representatives of that school, men of no mean talent, and who have scored innumerable triumphs, like Octave Mirbeau, Léon Descaves, Paul Adam, Paul and Victor Margueritte, J.-H. Rosny.* I

* I should have liked to dwell upon the two brothers who sign J.-H. Rosny; they were among the idols of my youthful enthusiasm; and they once seemed to me the most earnest, as well as the most learned, and perhaps all round the most gifted, of contemporary French—or Franco-Belgian—writers. They cover a wider field than any novelist I know, not excepting H. G. Wells—from prehistoric times to the anarchistic movement in the slums of Paris and the dim vistas of to-morrow. Spoilt at first by pedantry and clumsiness of style, later by indecent haste and carelessness, they have failed to attain the place which seemed due to them.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

should have liked to devote a special chapter to women writers. They are less numerous, perhaps less prominent, in France than in the English-speaking world; yet they are responsible for much excellent work. *Marie-Claire*, by the seamstress Marguerite Audoux, took the literary world by storm a few years ago, and is not yet forgotten; at the other pole, the reckless novels of Colette Willy have a directness, a sincerity, which almost silence, for a time, our moral judgment; *The House of Sin*, *Hellé*, and *The Rebel*, by Marcelle Tynaire, rank very high among modern productions, and I am told by good authorities that her *Eve of Battle* is one of the best things inspired so far by the European conflict. The historical romance,* the Voltairian philosophical tale,† the story of peasant life,‡ the exotic novel, cosmopolitan§ or colonial,|| all deserved separate notice. The field is rich, and as "innumerable" as the heart of Countess Mathieu de Noailles.¶

* Maurice Maindron.

† André Beaunier.

‡ Guillaumin, E. Moselly.

§ C. Farrère.

|| Bertrand, J. and J. Tharaud, Pierre Mille.

¶ Cf. also Marcel Prévost, like Bourget a psychologist not afraid of risky subject (*Les Demi-Vierges*), who, like Bourget again, turned into a conservative moralist, although not quite so orthodox as the author of *The Sense of Death*.

INTRODUCTION

My selection, I confess, has been purely empirical. I have picked out those writers who have secured universal recognition—that recognition which cannot be measured by the praise of critics, by academic honours, or by profitable sales separately, but by a combination of all three. Anatole France, Loti, Bourget, Barrès, are members of the French Academy; they are hailed as masters by the young generation; long articles in all languages, and even books, are devoted to the study of their art and thought. Romain Rolland has not yet received the same rewards: but the world-wide standing of his *Jean-Christophe* made it impossible to exclude him.

These five writers cannot be said, in any sense, to form a group, or even to represent a “generation.” The youngest of them, Romain Rolland, is forty-eight; the oldest, Anatole France, is seventy-two. Anatole France was born six years before Guy de Maupassant, who died twenty-three years ago, and already belongs to the classical past. Yet these five men stand a little closer than dates would seem to indicate. The talent of Anatole France did not develop early. He won his fame in the same decade as

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

his younger rivals, Bourget, Loti, and even Barrès—that is to say, between 1885 and 1895. Romain Rolland, comparatively, is a newcomer. But it is the generation of yesterday that he attempts to describe. He is, at any rate, the last great novelist that revealed himself before the world-war; and, rightly or wrongly, it is generally believed that European literature, and particularly Parisian fiction, will not be quite the same after the great ordeal.

Anatole France is first of all the master of style, the delicate artist, the dilettante; then the keenest of wits, ranging from kindest humour to most biting irony; a disciple of Voltaire and Renan who, late in the day, wandered with the sectaries of Karl Marx. In Pierre Loti, we have a new Chateaubriand—a painter and a poet, dragging under many skies his incurable ennui and his nameless longings. Bourget, the chronicler of “society,” is also the most searching of psychologists, a moralist of undisputed orthodoxy, and a lay doctor of the Catholic Church. Barrès, a sensitive artist, a restless, paradoxical mind, passed from the Cult of Self and from fevered romanticism to the worship of national traditions, “the soil and the dead.” Romain

INTRODUCTION

Rolland attempted nothing less than a total synthesis of modern European culture. I do not claim that this quintet of names is, in itself, "necessary and sufficient." Yet not one could well be spared, and there is hardly an aspect of French thought that is not adequately represented in their works.

§ 4. THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND.

National discouragement, popular vitality.

The period through which these authors have lived, and which, directly or indirectly, they describe in most of their books, is one of the least sensational in French history. In politics, a government *de facto*, the result of a compromise, considered by all parties not even as an experiment, but as a makeshift; an amorphous Republic, a democracy in name, but in fact a plutocracy, a bureaucracy, and a bistrocracy* in unholy alliance; a régime saved from disaster by the divisions of its enemies, by the weary scepticism of the masses, by the dread of adventure which had come over a nation once idealistic

* Bistro: Parisian slang for wine-shop, saloon, or public house.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

and Utopian. In society, a gradual levelling: all the great historical families crumbling down under the erosion of political despair and economic decadence; whilst the enormous middle class, enriched by those alluvions, would slowly rise, until the old feudal castles were half buried in the new ground. In the economic world, a prosperity without optimism, as it was due, not to rapidly expanding resources, but to unremitting labour and cheese-paring economy. In religion, a scene of anarchy. Catholicism, the only form of historical Christianity that shows any sign of vitality in France, was compromised in an unfortunate alliance with political reaction. Science, once an idol, had to confess bankruptcy so far as metaphysics and ethics were concerned. On the whole, an age of comfort and hopelessness; to all appearances, the weariness and sadness of declining years, the decrepitude of a nation bled white by wars and revolutions; a flock without a shepherd, a people without a star.

Hence the cast of melancholy in French national life and in French literature. This gloom was due to the tragic century through which France had just passed. Within the memory of Anatole France, Loti, Bourget, and

INTRODUCTION

even Barrès, the country had known defeat, dismemberment, revolution: the Franco-German War and the Commune. Beyond that, the harsh glittering materialism of the Second Empire, with its swagger and corruption; further still, the generous Revolution of '48, wrecked in a sea of blood; back of all, the gigantic failures of the great Revolution and the First Empire. Never had any nation nursed such exalted hopes, toiled and striven so hard, only to be dashed, time after time, from the heights she had all but attained. The France that I knew was a nation with a wounded soul. This war may save her. But the acceptance of a new defeat would amount to spiritual suicide.

Yet here, again, I am keenly conscious of the divorce between the daily existence of actual men and women, and that entity called "the national spirit." As a collectivity, France was given over to cynicism and despair. Individually, the French were probably happier, as they were undoubtedly healthier, safer, more prosperous, better educated, than in any previous period of their long history. There was a curious contrast, which has not failed to strike many observers, between the sanity, the steadiness, the love for

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

work, the cheerfulness of the *people*, and the morbidity of the *nation*. The same man would feel sick unto death as a French citizen—but well, strong and prosperous as a worker, as a husband, as a father. Such a phenomenon is by no means unique. Is there not an apparent antinomy between the average German, such as we knew him before the war, a hard-working, home-loving, peaceable individual addicted to beer and music, and the German as part and parcel of the national identity? Can *Gemüthlichkeit* and *Schrecklichkeit* cohabit in the same Teutonic heart? Now, which is the deeper reality—the collectivity or the individual? I should be tempted to answer: the individual. Many people are barely conscious of the larger social units; even the most public-spirited among us think and feel in terms of the State for but a few moments every day. Yet, the collective being, the nation, the *Zeitgeist*, with its fits of enthusiasm and depression, has a very real existence, and that existence affects directly the lives of individuals. It is the nations, not the individuals, that are at present at war: but it is the individuals who suffer and die.

This cast of despair in the French mind is the

INTRODUCTION

essential fact in the last forty years. It explains, for one thing, the sordid brutality of the Naturalistic school, represented by Zola in the novel, and by Henri Becque on the stage. Anatole France, Loti, Bourget, Barrès, do not belong to that school. Indeed, they may be said to be the leaders of the opposition and the reaction against it. In spite of his universal indulgence, Anatole France damned Zola in no equivocal terms: "It were better for him if he had never been born." But it was a reaction only against the systematic coarseness of the form: the pessimistic spirit is the same. Under the academic or aristocratic style of these writers, you will find as sombre a conception of human nature as in the least savoury of Zola's works.

§ 5. THE CONFLICT OF IDEALS.

Tradition—Beauty—Justice.

This feeling of uneasiness and hopelessness was not due to the absence of ideals but rather to their multiplicity. Pulled hither and thither, unable to advance, France grew sceptical and weary. From this legion of ideals, we shall

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

select the three most representative: tradition, beauty, social justice.

The first had become the ideal of Taine, and even of Renan, the undisputed masters of the last generation. Under the positive influence of English thought, and the negative influence of the Commune, Taine had come to seek national salvation in historical continuity, organic development, "the wisdom of prejudice." A national culture is the growth of centuries: this growth the rationalism of Voltaire and the antinatural experiments of the Jacobins have checked. France is very sick indeed; and the axe of the Jacobins is threatening the few mighty roots that still keep the tree alive—patriotism, property, the family, religion. This school of thought is frankly conservative, and even reactionary; as represented by Taine himself, it is hard, positive, pessimistic, thorough-going; unlovable, and yet tonic. We find among its disciples Brunetière, Maurras, Paul Bourget, and, in his second avatar, Maurice Barrès. This ideal, in a sense, is self-destructive: for the Revolution has become part and parcel of the French tradition, and perhaps the most essential part. Traditionalists cannot wipe away a century and a

INTRODUCTION

quarter of history. Perhaps it were better that the Revolution had never broken out. But facts are facts, against which no "might-have-been" will ever prevail. Reactionary writers pride themselves on their "sense for realities," and jeer at millennial dreams. But the difference between Utopia and anachronism is perhaps not so great as they imagine; and their idealized Ancient Régime may be fully as fanciful as the golden age prophesied by the early Socialists.

By the side of the Traditionalists, we have—shall we say the *Æsthetes*, or the *Æstheticists*?—the worshippers of pure beauty. Gautier had preached art for art's sake in the early thirties; and this doctrine underlies much of Romanticism, from Chateaubriand to Baudelaire. It was reserved for Renan, at the very close of his career, to enlarge the cult of beauty so as to make it a rule of life. *Æstheticism* may be used as the basis of a very strict code of morals: in Renan himself, it developed into an amused indulgence akin to laxity. The æsthetic tendency is represented by Barrès in his early novels; by Pierre Loti, but with a strange background of Protestant puritanism which imparts a unique depth of melancholy to his exotic love affairs;

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

by Pierre Louÿs, consistent enough in his beautifully finished pictures of ancient and modern depravation; and chiefly by Anatole France, who might be called Renan's younger brother.

The third ideal is a craving for enlightenment and social justice. It continues the "philosophical" movement of the eighteenth century, and the humanitarianism of 1848. Seventy years ago, democracy had impregnated the minds of the great French writers—George Sand, Victor Hugo, Lamennais, Michelet, Pierre Leroux, Proudhon. After a long eclipse, a period during which the harsh pseudo-science of Karl Marx claimed sole right to the name Socialism, the idealism of '48 resumed its place in French thought. Through the influence of a generous and far-sighted leader, Jean Jaurès, Socialism took the right side in the great spiritual conflict of the Dreyfus case; and as a reward, it won over the two foremost writers of the day, the two extremes of French literature—Zola the plebeian and Anatole France the fastidious artist. But the victory remained incomplete. Zola was no longer at his best when he wrote his *Gospels*, one of which, *Work*, is an adaptation of Fourierism. The dull reaction of the

INTRODUCTION

last ten or twelve years drove Anatole France back into alternatives of flippancy and despair. Romain Rolland is Yea and Nay.

So far as literature is concerned, Traditionalism is by far the most powerful of these three tendencies; and so long as the war spirit remains in the ascendant, there will be no chance for the democratic ideal to assume leadership.

Tradition, beauty, social justice ! Hard is the lot of the conscientious man, in a world in which the ideal has thus become disintegrated. Who does not hate the thought of sacrificing any of the three ? Tradition : how can a Frenchman fail to be a born traditionalist, with the monuments of immemorial culture everywhere round him, with the masterpieces of a thousand years singing in his memory ? Yet he knows that bigotry, intellectual laziness, the selfish defence of unmerited privileges, use tradition as their bulwark. Beauty : but why have men made her name synonymous with levity and looseness, the least beautiful things in the world ; and why has narrow-minded virtue so often waged war against beauty, however innocent ? Justice : but do we not see the grimace of rage and envy behind her impassive mask, and the nightmare

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of enforced equality behind her fair promises ? There is no ideal that does not clash with another ; none that is not smirched by the excesses of its devotees. A world out of joint, if ever there was one ; the query of jesting Pilate still unanswered, and the philosophy of Ecclesiastes unrefuted.

Such was the atmosphere in which our writers lived, such were the problems they had to face. None of these problems did they settle, even to their own satisfaction. In Loti as in Barrès, in Anatole France as in Paul Bourget, even in Romain Rolland, the note of doubt, of anguish, is stronger at the end than at the beginning of their careers. They did not settle the riddles of man's destiny : but was it nothing to tackle them so boldly ? On the whole, the impression you will get from an unbiassed survey of modern French fiction will be one of candour and fearlessness. These men may be drifting towards unknown abysses : at any rate, their eyes will remain open to the end, and their lips are still able to smile. A sacrificed generation perhaps, whirling in apparent aimlessness, doomed to failure : but not unworthy of Pascal and Vigny,

INTRODUCTION

who taught us the dignity of thought, greater than all the blind forces that may threaten to crush it. They have lost their way, but not their souls; and far from scorning them for stumbling in the dark, we the happier pilgrims whose star is distant, but steadfast and clear, we bow our heads in gratitude before these wanderers.

CHAPTER II

ANATOLE FRANCE : BEFORE THE
DREYFUS CASE

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ANATOLE FRANCE: BEFORE THE DREYFUS CASE.

§ 1. A GENERAL SURVEY OF ANATOLE FRANCE'S CAREER.

A personal glimpse—France's supremacy—The four periods in his career.

I HAD but once the privilege of seeing and hearing Anatole France. It was on the 4th of March, 1900, at the height of the political and spiritual storm caused by the Dreyfus Case. Unforgettable hours! The immediate issue was small: the fate of one individual, whose personality did not call for warm sympathy, and whose ideals were those of his persecutors. But the air was electric with strange hopes. We felt as our ancestors must have felt in the tragic fraternal dawn of the years 1789 and 1848. Paris and all the great cities were soon studded with reading circles and social centres, ambitiously called "Popular Universities." The second district of Paris, a bulwark of reaction, had finally followed the example of the poorer quarters.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

It was to have its university, symbolically named "The Awakening." And the opening of this new citadel of science and democracy was to be celebrated by addresses from Jaurès and Anatole France. The Southern bombast of Jaurès, the loud harshness of his voice, the vulgarity of his appearance, made a strong and painful impression upon me, much as I respected the man, his character, his message, and even his art. But Anatole France! I know what loyalty, and devotion, and hero-worship mean; I have seen Edward VII. at the time of his coronation; I have seen Theodore Roosevelt on his return from Africa, and before he had ventured into more treacherous jungles; I have seen the Peerless Leader himself, in the auditorium of a democratic stronghold: but never have I felt the same delicate harmony between the hero of the occasion and his admirers, the same exquisite blend of enthusiasm and tactful restraint, of familiarity and respect, as in that Parisian meeting, sixteen very long years ago. Anatole France was no idol, no pontiff; he was addressed, in good socialistic parlance, as "comrade." Still less was he a circus curiosity, a "two-headed calf," as Colonel Roosevelt bluntly said,

ANATOLE FRANCE

in the course of his recent Western trip, with reference to a rival attraction. With no hereditary, social, religious or political authority, by the mere prestige of his courage and of his art, he was a Master. This meeting was one of the deepest experiences in my life. Those who think of the people of Paris as hopelessly frivolous, and of Anatole France as a delightful, decadent writer of sinful trifles, might have received from the orators and from the audience of that day a lesson in genuine seriousness and the *sine qua non* of moral worth. I shall have to express in no equivocal terms my complete disagreement with much of France's philosophy, and my contempt—there is no other word—for certain aspects of his talent: for that very reason, I wanted to strike at the very first the deep note of appreciation, and almost of reverence, which I should like to remain audible throughout these two chapters.

For the primacy of Anatole France in French literature is unchallenged, as unchallenged as the primacy of Rodin in art, or that of Bergson in philosophy. He is the delight of the élite, and at least a glorious name for the people. The Conservatives do not forget that for many years

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

he was one of them; they still relish his exquisite style, his rich, allusive humour, his courtly manner, his love of literary traditions. The Socialists have read his speeches, his tracts, and many of his stories republished in popular form. I understand that he has volunteered, and begged, at seventy—he, the anti-militarist, the anarchist, the dilettante—the favour of wearing the French uniform: so he may profit by the general reconciliation, the “Sacred Union,” which war is supposed to have brought about among all Frenchmen, and he may die regretted equally by Prospero and by Caliban.

I had seen pictures of Anatole France, in monkish garb, with a background of formidable-looking books: his appearance was a surprise to me, but hardly a disappointment. There was little of the scholar about him, and nothing of the book-worm; still less could any traces of ecclesiastical influence be found. His best-known avatars—Sylvestre Bonnard, the unworldly antiquarian; Lucien Bergeret, the humble, awkward, puny hero of pure intelligence; Jérôme Coignard, the fat, jolly, disreputable theologian—cannot claim to be his portraits. Tall, well-proportioned, elegantly dressed, with

ANATOLE FRANCE

imperial moustache and goatee, then just turning white, Anatole France looked for all the world like a cavalry officer. One of his intellectual forbears, who deserved before him the name "an ironical Benedictine," Sainte-Beuve, sighed to be, if he had to live again, a lieutenant in the hussars. And Renan came very near confessing the same yearning. Nature was kinder to Anatole France than to his two masters in scepticism and epicurianism. A cavalry officer with the erudition of Bayle and the wit of Voltaire—not such a bad combination after all, so far as this world is concerned.

"Absurd alone is he who never changes." We shall have to study not one Anatole France, but several, in that life which has already over-spanned the allotted three-score and ten. For the sake of clearness, I shall distinguish in his career four and perhaps five periods. But France is not one of those systematic writers who change radically and all of a sudden. His life has been outwardly uneventful; his soul, from the first, elusive and wavy. So his evolution did not proceed by jerks; it may rather be likened to a succession of finely modulated chords: the ends of the series may be wide apart, yet nothing in

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

the transition has jarred the most sensitive ear. When we read over France's first books with the knowledge derived from his later works, we wonder whether any new element has been added in the course of years to that subtle and wonderfully complex personality. The evolution of Anatole France is rather the growth and enrichment of our understanding and appreciation of him. Our earliest conception of Anatole France is that of a singularly gentle spirit, full of curiosity as well as kindness; free and open-minded as beseems a scholar, and not afraid of adventurous speculation, but whose quaint paradoxes were deemed innocuous, so entirely did they seem divorced from real life, so conservative were the tastes and prejudices of the author. This is the pure and idyllic Anatole France of *The Book of My Friend* and *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*—a lover of children, priests and old scholars, himself a mixture of the scholar, the priest and the child; a Renan expurgated for the use of orthodox families.

In his early books and articles, the delicate irony of Anatole France pricked the bubbles of human absurdity; but it did so with smiling sympathy, and it respected implicitly the funda-

ANATOLE FRANCE

mental traditions of the race. Under the influence of Chateaubriand and Renan, Anatole France admired, as an archæologist, as an artist, even as a man, things which a pure Voltairian rationalist would have called superstitions. But irony cannot long be kept within bounds: gradually, the gentle wit of Anatole France became more destructive. He remained clearly conscious of the artistic witchery of the past; but he was even more clearly conscious of its incongruities. Written in the tone of the *Lives of the Saints*, *Thaïs* is a satire on early Christian asceticism. Beyond Renan, beyond Chateaubriand, he went back to his veritable spiritual ancestors Voltaire and Bayle. Without any personal or partisan interests to serve, he waged war on "prejudices and superstitions." Whoever has read that breviary of elegant anarchism, *The Opinions of Jérôme Coignard*, will realize that the terms "prejudices and superstitions," in his mind, applied to every dogma and to every institution. Amid these ruins of all authorities, what guide shall we follow? None but our senses, in all possible meanings of the word. This leads us to materialism, under a veil of absolute scepticism; to the enjoyment of art-as

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

the most delicate feast we can give our senses; to enjoyment pure and simple—even when it is neither simple nor pure—whenever and wherever it can be snatched; in a word to sensuousness, and even to sensuality. Of this consistent creed, the *Red Lily* is the gospel.

However, during that very period, the germs of positive Voltairianism, unheeded, were not lacking; and by positive Voltairianism, I mean those purely human qualities which may be carried to the point of heroism: intellectual courage, love for freedom and justice, humanitarian sympathies. In his controversy with Bourget concerning *The Disciple*, in many articles in praise of the eighteenth century, Anatole France revealed himself the descendant of those philosophers who prepared the great Revolution.

So we need not be astonished that Anatole France, the universal ironist, should, at the time of the Dreyfus case, have made up his mind, with no less promptitude and decision than his rival in Pyrrhonism, Jules Lemaître—but on the opposite side. He found himself with the defenders of truth, justice and pity. And, with touching humility, he attempted to be a little

ANATOLE FRANCE

child again, as it were; he went back to school, and he accepted, because of their deep harmony with his aspirations, the tenets of a most rigid orthodoxy, the bonds of an iron discipline, those of the Socialist party. We have then a third Anatole, no longer idyllic, but no longer flippant; whose irony is of less airy, fantastic flight, because it is weighted with purpose; less supreme as an artist, less free as a thinker, greater as a citizen.

Finally, the unworthy compromise which closed the Dreyfus case, the disheartening failure of Radicalism—once an ideal, now a machine; the verbosity of some Socialists, the bigotry of others, the sombre violence of syndicalism, the revival of militarism in Europe, cast their gloom on Anatole France as on the rest of his countrymen; and his last books were either trifling, or full of nihilism and despair. Of this fourth period, the best and most typical product is *Penguin Island*.

Will the Great War open a fifth period? Who knows? We may, in due season, venture our own hypothesis. It is unfortunately but too probable that at any moment Death, a greater ironist than France himself, will set at nought our attempts at prophecy.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

§ 2. FORMATION AND FIRST PERIOD: GENTLE IRONY.

Early surroundings—Education—*The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*—*The Book of my Friend*.

Jacques Anatole Thibault—for such is the true name of Anatole France—was born in the heart of Paris in 1844. Of the district where he was born, and where practically the whole of his childhood was spent, he speaks in terms of almost lyrical tenderness. And well he may, for there are few places in the world so fraught with beauty and with historical associations. From his father's shop on Quai Malaquais, he could see, across the River Seine, the interminable galleries of the Louvre; up river, that is to say, towards the east, the humpy dome of the Institute, unpretending, somewhat awkward, but kindly and venerable like Sylvestre Bonnard himself; beyond, the Island of the City, like a great vessel anchored in mid-stream; in the City, the feudal turrets of the Conciergerie, the massive towers of Notre-Dame, and, in contrast, those two miracles of Gothic grace, the slender, needle-like spires of the Cathedral and of the Sainte-Chapelle; farther still, the Renaissance

ANATOLE FRANCE

belfry of the Town Hall, and a forest of domes and towers; westward, the masses of foliage of the Tuileries and the Champs-Élysées, and the rising ground leading to the great Triumphal Arch. There are more abundant rivers, swifter-flowing and more picturesque; there are town sites of bolder outlines, skies of less neutral hue, monuments of more imposing size and more striking beauty: for a thoughtful observer, there is no scene that sends forth a deeper appeal. Ten centuries of war, labour, prayer and artistic activity, the blood and the dreams of forty generations were required to finish that picture, so rich in its apparent simplicity, so harmonious in its subtle heterogeneity. Along the quay wall, on the parapet, are boxes of second-hand books, the dear *bouquins* that every Parisian has picked up and fondled for many a happy hour. There, in the penny department, you will find the most wonderful chaos of pamphlets in all stages of dilapidation. But the calf-bound volumes of the eighteenth century are still plentiful and cheap—marvellously preserved in spite of all their adventures and their open-air life, with never a loose leaf to mar the smoothness of their red edges. Across the way, the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

ground-floor of the houses—most of which were built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—is occupied by curiosity shops: art dealers, sellers of ancient furniture, armours, prints, and old books of rarer description than those in the open stalls. It was in one of those bookstores that young Thibault was brought up. The material circumstances of his parents were narrow; but the street and the shop opened infinite perspectives, vista within vista, into the dim Nevermore. Anatole France has said, with pardonable pride: “A boy brought up amid such surroundings can never be quite stupid.” And his mind has been repeatedly likened to an antiquary’s store. Better still, for it does not lack life and unity, it might be compared to the city picture that spread itself before his young eyes. If we could evoke the Spirit of Paris, ancient and modern, the aspirations and fancies that expressed themselves in those piles of stone, it would be none other but the rich and smiling mind of Anatole France himself.

M. Thibault, Anatole’s father, was no heartless buyer and seller, but a lover and collector of books. By his own efforts he had become quite a scholar, and was particularly well informed

ANATOLE FRANCE

about the great Revolution, which he held in abomination. Anatole France showed from early childhood that passion for books and for erudition, which is so strongly marked in all his favourite heroes, Sylvestre Bonnard, Jérôme Coignard, Lucien Bergeret. It is not every child, not even every college graduate, that dreams to write a History of France in fifty volumes, with all the details, beginning with Teutobochus. When, in his old age, he composed his painstaking, often delightful, and thoroughly unconvincing History of Joan of Arc, the famous novelist was not so entirely out of his element as superficial critics affected to believe.

The bookseller had brought to Paris the strong monarchical convictions of his native Anjou. Among his customers and friends were not a few old men, born under the Revolution, perhaps even during the last few years of the ancient régime, and who mourned with him the downfall of the last Bourbon King. Anatole France has sketched for us several of these amiable fossils: through them, the reign of Louis XVI., for us almost as remote as that of Charlemagne, was to him a living tradition. In his style, in some

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of his ideas, he is still a man of the eighteenth century.

He studied at Collège Stanislas, a hybrid secondary school, under the control of the Church, yet assimilated with the Government establishments. He was a good scholar in Greek and Latin: but the most perfect stylist of his generation was reported as doing poor work in his French themes: he was lacking in taste, his masters said, and, of course, they ought to know. The eighteenth century and classical antiquity—late Hellenism in particular—were the chief influences in the formation of his mind. Catholicism took little hold of him. He tells us how, at the age of five or six, he attempted the career of a martyr and saint. He stood on the kitchen fountain, in pious imitation of Saint Simon Stylites; he tore his clothes and dragged them in the mire, in emulation of Saint Benedict Labre; he stuffed horsehair down his back, as the best substitute for the sackcloth of the penitents; and he wanted to be an anchorite in the Botanical Garden. But the cause of this heroism was of this world, worldly; he wanted to be able to print on his visiting cards: Hermit and Saint of the Calendar. Later on,

ANATOLE FRANCE

he tells us how irksome the practice of confession was to him; not that he objected to telling the priest his sins; but because he could not find any to tell. He tried picking some at random out of a book which contained a full list: but their mysterious names—prevarication, simony, concupiscence—frightened him. Fortunately, the cap of his friend Fontanet gave him opportunities for more appropriate offences: he would snatch it, hide it, fill it with sand, throw it into the gutter, and thus be spared the humiliation of presenting himself before the tribunal of penitence with a lamentably blank conscience. Now, it is a fact that confession arouses, even in very young children, of less exquisite sensitiveness than Anatole, crises of morbid introspection, and even of dangerous despair: his indifference is symptomatic. He is what William James calls a once-born soul, or what, more bluntly, might be called a Pagan. He lacks the fundamental experience of religion, the conviction of sin. A tremendous lack! I understand the pride of the Scottish lady who said: “I was *brought up* on total depravity.” Anatole France’s early religion was nought but religiosity: the æsthetic enjoyment of Church ceremonies, a

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

vague melancholy, a still vaguer yearning ever doomed to disappointment. It must be said in extenuation that the atmosphere of a fashionable Parisian school was not favourable to deep spiritual emotions: the formalism and frivolity of aristocratic society permeated the College, in spite of the efforts of the priests. Renan had the same experience when he was a pupil of Mgr. Dupanloup. Like Renan, like Voltaire, Anatole France preserved his personal liking for priests; like them, he became one of the leaders of anticlerical free-thought. The delightful chapters on Lantaigne and Guitrel, in the first part of *Contemporary History*, could not have been written with such sympathetic insight, with such piercing and yet tender irony, had France been brought up an infidel.

Anatole France began his literary career in leisurely fashion. Books, his old friends, supported him long before he became an author: he was a librarian, and a reader for the excellent firm of Alphonse Lemerre, the publisher of contemporary poets. If we pass over a brief critical study of Alfred de Vigny, France's first publications were two volumes of verse, elegant without originality, revealing a certain deftness

ANATOLE FRANCE

of touch, a wide range of reading and interests, and but little inspiration. Then appeared two short novels *Jocaste* and *The Lean Cat*. The former is a good average story: in plot and style, it may be defined as Alphonse Daudet diluted, just as Daudet is Zola thinned out: a third decoction of naturalism. The second is a readable skit on some curious districts of Parisian Bohemia—the black belt thereof. The eloquent mulatto Godet-Laterrasse, who is preparing an epoch-making work on *The Regeneration of the World through the Black Race*, is an amusing puppet rather than a convincing character. But General Telemachus is portrayed at full length, and with delightful humour. He is a suburban innkeeper, who has once commanded a horde of barefooted dusky heroes under His Majesty Soulouque, Emperor of Hayti; and the wistfulness with which he gazes on his old gorgeous uniform elicits a smile free from bitterness and contempt. The General is a hoary child; but he is a man and a brother for all that.

This quality of kindly humour is rare in French literature: rarer than the frank broad laugh of Rabelais or the sardonic smile of Voltaire. It was the keynote of *The Crime of Sylvestre*

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Bonnard, the first of Anatole France's masterpieces, and still perhaps the most delightful. The author was then thirty-seven years old: he could already interpret with sympathy the thoughts and feelings of his elderly hero, Sylvestre Bonnard, member of the Institute. Sylvestre, who is supposed to relate the story, is a scholar; and, of all branches of scholarship, he has elected the driest—drier than the very sands of the desert, medieval archæology. To outsiders, he is nought but the typical bookworm: stooping in his ill-fitting garments; short-sighted, awkward of gait, absent-minded, unpractical, tyrannized over by his faithful and grumpy old servant; a child, and a dull child at that, in the daily transactions of life; his heart shrivelled, to all appearances, under the desiccating influences of celibacy. The type has been sketched often enough: skilfully done, it might afford a certain amount of mild amusement. But we have Sylvestre Bonnard self-revealed before us, and we see what treasures of wit, of kindness, of imagination, of dreams and yearning, lie hidden behind his unpretending appearance. For one thing, Sylvestre has not lost all sense of proportion: much as he loves archæology and

ANATOLE FRANCE

philology, he knows that the fate of the world does not depend upon the old manuscript of Jehan Toumouillé, which he seeks in vain as far as Palermo. He remembers how ardently he longed once for a certain doll—a hideous doll, quite unworthy of his sex and age, for he was then nearly eight years old; and he cannot help likening his earliest to his latest caprice. When he tells us of Prince and Princess Trepof, who are scouring the world in search of match-boxes to complete their queer collection, we understand the moral of the fable: there is a good deal of the match-box collector in every devotee of science. Bonnard is an archæologist: but he is also a child of Paris, and he has not unlearned the gentle art of smiling at his own pursuits. His eyes are not so dim that he does not notice distress among his neighbours; and, unpractical though he be, he knows how to give orders and exert himself in the cause of charity. The first part of the book, “The Log,” is the story of such a kind deed, which, long forgotten, brings its unexpected and most fitting reward. A poor couple, the Coccoz, have been allowed to occupy a garret in the same house as Sylvestre, whilst the leaky roof was undergoing repairs: the old

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

scholar orders his servant to give them food and fuel, and in particular a big log, a real Christmas log. Mr. Coccoz dies; Mrs. Coccoz and her child vanish. Years afterwards, chasing as far as Sicily an elusive manuscript of the Golden Legend, Sylvestre Bonnard comes across a Princess Trepof, in whom he naturally fails to recognize poor little Mrs. Coccoz. He returns baffled in his quest: the MS. has left Sicily to be sold by auction in Paris. It soars to a price far beyond the reach of a modest archæologist. But when Bonnard goes home, he finds a Yule Log, hollowed out—and within, on a bed of violets of Parma, the precious manuscript itself. Princess Trepof had paid the debt of Mme. Coccoz.

In the second part, “Jeanne Alexandre,” we have the key to that perennial youthfulness of the old bachelor’s heart. There has been a romance in his life—a humble, almost silent romance, and he has remained faithful to the memory of the girl who jilted him. Fate wills it that he should come across the granddaughter* of his early love. He realizes that “he had played with books as a child plays

* In early editions the daughter.

ANATOLE FRANCE

with hucklebones." Henceforth his declining years will have a meaning and a purpose: Clementine's grand-daughter is poor: he will protect her, and—the eternal problem of French parents—find a dowry for her. How he rescues her, by a sort of elopement, from a boarding-school where she was cruelly treated; how she becomes the grace and cheer of his lonely hearth; how she falls in love with, and marries, an eligible young man, also an archæologist; how Sylvestre plans to sell his library to make up her dowry, only reserving a few cherished books; how the sacrifice is beyond his strength, and how, one by one, he steals from Jeanne's dowry those books that he cannot bear to let go (this is the "crime" referred to in the title): these slight, commonplace, undramatic events are sufficient to keep up the interest even of a frivolous reader. But the charm of the book is not in the plot. Like most of the works of Anatole France, this is not a continuous narrative, but a series of loosely connected sketches, essays, and meditations. And the style, as Buffon said, is "the man himself": with the most delightful affectation of quaint pedantry, suddenly relieved by a flash of wit; humorous, but never cynical;

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

full of sentiment without sentimentality; combining unequalled freshness with quiet dignity. Sylvestre Bonnard, even more than Colonel Newcome, is the character I should most like to meet in the flesh.

The Desires of Jean Servien, which followed in 1882, is one of the weakest of Anatole France's novels; it marks a relapse below the level of *Jocaste*. *Abeille* is a delightful fairy tale, which may be heartily recommended to Anglo-American readers, young and old. In *Le Livre de mon Ami* (*The Book of my Friend*), we find again the Anatole France of the first period at his best. The author shows himself as successful in his delineation of childhood as he was in his portrayal of old age, and his little Pierre Nozière endears himself to us in the same manner, and almost to the same degree, as Sylvestre Bonnard. The work is divided into two parts: "The Book of Pierre" and "The Book of Suzanne." The second is excellent, but not supreme: it lacks the directness, the absolute freshness of the first. For "The Book of Pierre" is confessedly and accurately autobiographical: only a few differences can be traced between Pierre and Anatole. Dr. Nozière, the physi-

ANATOLE FRANCE

cian and amateur anthropologist, stands somewhat higher in the social scale than M. Thibault, the bookseller and self-taught antiquarian: but the atmosphere of the two homes was the same—modest, yet cultured. I have already alluded to some of the episodes in considering Anatole France's early religious experiences. Every chapter is a literary gem, complete in itself: but the book has a striking unity of style and purpose, and a range quite unusual among *Souvenirs of Childhood*; for France manages to work into his *Memoirs*, in the most natural manner, a number of sketches and events extending from the Revolution to the heyday of the Second Empire, and from the West Indies to Japan. The great difficulty about books of that kind is that too often we hear the gruff and cynical voice of the stained and scarred middle-aged man through the lips of a child; or else we shudder at the antics of a grown-up who wilfully attempts to be young again. Even Kenneth Graham's *Golden Age*, one of the most fascinating books about children that I have ever come across, is unconvincing at times on account of its constant cleverness. The miracle in *The Book of my Friend* is that the impressions, the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

words, are the genuine impressions and words of a child: there is no jarring note; yet all the experience, the erudition, the humour of the mature man are ever present too, as a subdued accompaniment which delicately brings out the melody. In other words, there are two characters constantly before our eyes: in the foreground, the little schoolfellow, trotting, merry as a lark, through the Luxembourg Gardens, his bundle of books on his back, his marbles in his pocket; in the background, unobtrusive yet never forgotten, the ripe, pensive scholar, touched with silver and sadness, who looks with such a wistful smile on his cheery, innocent Self of thirty years before. Yet we are not conscious of a dual presence, or even of a dissociated personality, so complete is the essential identity of the two. The student, the artist, the dreamer, existed potentially in the thoughtful little boy brought up amid treasures of science and beauty; and, be it said to Anatole France's credit, the pure-hearted, loving child was not dead in the heart of the critic, novelist, and man of the world. This is a hard test indeed: how many of us can look at their own portraits of thirty years ago without a pang of shame?

ANATOLE FRANCE

Let us take as an example of a narrative with a double perspective the chapter entitled "The Lady in White." Little Pierre has two neighbours and friends, an old lady always in black, and her niece, always in white. They are very fond of him, and spoil him. Pierre is "the little husband" of the Lady in White, and takes his rights and privileges so seriously that he feels deeply hurt when an Intruder, a hateful big man, faultlessly dressed and groomed, appears upon the scene. The Lady in White has a Big Husband, far away, a diplomat in Japan. The Intruder is the husband's colleague and friend. The Lady in White no longer laughs as she used to; she receives letters that make her cry. The Intruder calls repeatedly, and once, in the absence of the Lady in Black, he requests that Pierre be sent away. So Pierre has to wait, with growing impatience, in the dining-room, until, unable to stand it any longer, he bursts into the parlour. Up gets the Intruder, who was on his knees before the Lady in White. He looks daggers at Pierre, and makes a passionate gesture, as if he would like to throw him out of the window. But the Lady in White clasps her little husband to her bosom, and the Intruder

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

vanishes. There is not a thought that a child of five could not have thought, not a word that he could not have said. Yet, behind his artless narrative, we see with perfect clearness a complete romance: the frivolous husband, charming as best he may the tedium of diplomatic exile; the lonely, long-suffering wife; the false friend who attempts to comfort her; the anonymous letters denouncing the husband's misconduct; the supreme temptation; and Pierre rushing to the defence of innocence, like a little *Deus ex machina*.

Most delightful is the story of Pierre's first love affair. About seventeen, the boy, hitherto keen-minded and active, became languid, dreamy, stupid. He did not know the nature of the delicious poison that was running through his veins: it was a passage of Virgil that enlightened him, for Pierre was from the first a bookman. On the authority of the Roman poet, he came to the conclusion that it must be love—love in the abstract. The first concrete realization of his sentiment was Mme. Ganse, a friend of his mother, the pretty widow of a well-known composer. Pierre worshipped her. One evening, when her looks, her smile, her perfume, her

ANATOLE FRANCE

wonderful rendering of Chopin, had more than usual deprived him of his self-possession, she asked him: "Are you fond of music?" And, closing his eyes, almost in a trance, he answered these fateful words: "Yes, sir!" Hardly were they spoken but he wished the earth would open and engulf him. For days and weeks, those syllables "Yes, sir!" kept ringing in his ears. He had thoughts of suicide. Twenty years later Pierre met Mme. Ganse again. In the course of the conversation, this time without a tremor, he alluded to the dazzling social success of his former idol. "Yes," she answered; "people used to like me, and I received many flattering tributes; but the homage that went most to my heart was that of a schoolboy, who when I asked him whether he liked music, answered: 'Yes, sir!' I don't know what kept me from kissing the child on both cheeks."*

* I am rather sorry to add that the success of *The Book of my Friend* had induced Anatole France to give it two sequels, *Pierre Nozière*, which came out in 1899, and *Le Petit Pierre*, now in course of publication in the *Revue de Paris*. That there are good things in both goes without saying, but the first book remains unique in its freshness and sustained excellence.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

§ 3. SECOND PERIOD: VOLTAIRIAN IRONY, ART FOR ART'S SAKE.

France as a writer of short stories—France as a literary critic—*Thaïs*—*The Rôtisserie of Queen Pédaque*—*The Red Lily*.

Anatole France's production for the next five years was limited to short stories and newspaper articles. The short story, I believe, requires a power of condensation which is foreign to the leisurely, delicate, undulating talent of Anatole France; so he cannot compare for a moment with the supreme masters of that difficult craft—with Guy de Maupassant, for instance. Some of his tales are almost confessedly pot-boilers; yet even the most indifferent are models of style, and the three series which belong to this period* should be carefully studied in order to trace in detail the evolution of his art and thought. In criticism, on the contrary, Anatole France ranks very high. He is the type of the critic who does not criticize, so universal is his curiosity, so catholic his taste, so absolute his scepticism as to rules, canons, principles of literature. He waged a controversy of command-

* *Balthazar*, *L'Etui de Nacre*, *Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*.

ANATOLE FRANCE

ing interest with Brunetière, the champion of traditional, dogmatic criticism: they were foes worthy of each other's steel. Brunetière was a pedant, no doubt, but fearless, candid, well-informed, dignified, and a close reasoner. France parried the heavy strokes of his battle-axe with the needle-like rapier of his own irony. I know of no more delightful reading for an idle hour than an odd volume of France's collected articles on Literary Life. Even Sainte-Beuve, even Montaigne, are more ponderous and less varied. With France, you cover the whole range of ancient and modern literature, without any effort, in the easy tone of polite conversation; anecdotes, philosophical digression, personal reminiscences, snatches of poetry, break the monotony of straight criticism. France is the prince of *causeurs* and, much more than Sainte-Beuve's, his articles are essentially talks, *causeries*. But the airy grace of the form, the easy gait and the rambling course, should not blind us to the seriousness of the matter: France is a trained historian, of immense reading, and at least a gifted amateur in moral philosophy. In the four volumes of this series, we detect his essential convictions better perhaps

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

than in his more formal books. We can trace the transformation of kindly irony into universal scepticism; the development of a purely human, naturalistic conception of the world; a code of ethics based exclusively on freedom, sympathy, pity;* also a growing hostility against the traditions and institutions which support supernaturalism, asceticism, dogmatism; and an open advocacy of the thought, even of the ethics, of the eighteenth century.

Thus we come to the second period in Anatole France's career, the greatest perhaps from the point of view of pure literature, the most puzzling from that of pure ethics. It comprises the wonderful trio, *Thaïs*, *The Rôtisserie of Queen Pédaugue*, and *The Red Lily*: the first a tale of Egypt in early Christian times, the second a pastiche of eighteenth-century memoirs, the third a novel of contemporary life.

Thaïs, in subject and style, might, to a superficial reader, seem to be the work of a devout son of the Church. A holy hermit, Paphnutius, has heard of the famous courtesan Thaïs in Alexandria; he goes to her, wrestles with

* Most beautifully expressed in a volume of miscellaneous reflections entitled *The Garden of Epicurus*.

ANATOLE FRANCE

Satan to save her soul, and finally brings her back to God. But in saving her, he has lost himself; the last rebellions of sensuality he can crush: pride in his own holiness proves a more subtle foe, and whilst *Thaïs* dies a saint, Paphnuthius ends in despair. The theology of the tale is irreproachable, and the style too is of the strictest orthodoxy: there is hardly a phrase that is not borrowed from the biography of some saint. Just as the smell of books and parchment pervaded *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, the pages of *Thaïs* are fragrant with an "odour of sanctity," that strange perfume of which the physiologist Georges Dumas has given us the chemical formula. On second thoughts, *Thaïs* appears as one of the most insidiously unchristian, or rather antichristian, books in modern literature. It is the last flower of the school of æsthetic Christianity which began with Chateaubriand. "Christianity is beautiful, therefore it is true": such was the central argument of Romantic apologetics. Renan, a Chateaubriand with a scientific training, said: "Legends are nought but legends: but, if they are beautiful, they are respectable, and have in them that element of truth which is inseparable

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

from beauty." Anatole France goes further: "Legends are legends. To the modern mind, they are absurd and laughable; but we refuse to pay them the homage of combating them seriously. We are liberal enough to enjoy, at the same time, the charm of their beauty and the humour of their absurdity." Thus we have a story to the full enjoyment of which apparent belief in miraculous Christianity is indispensable: yet the undercurrent of unbelief, at times of hostility, is ever perceptible. This discord mars the impression of the book: we are puzzled, uneasy. The irony is too continuous to be thoroughly enjoyable; and its presence is sufficient to spoil the spiritual passages, which, whilst faultlessly beautiful, are obviously insincere. Anatole France ought to have written *Thaïs* ten years before. In 1890 the eighteenth century had taken too strong a hold of him. The style suffers from the same duality of purpose as the thought. *Thaïs* is a work of art, the most carefully finished perhaps in the production of a master craftsman. But the art is too evident; the ironical notes make the pseudo-hagiographic passages unconvincing, and there is nothing so dismal as a prolonged and unconvincing pastiche. I prefer the frank

ANATOLE FRANCE

paganism, the open worship of sensuality, in a book visibly influenced by Anatole France, the *Aphrodite* of Pierre Louÿs; and the after-effect of *Thaïs* is fully as harmful as that of *Aphrodite*, because it is more insidious.*

Two passions are hidden and yet perceptible in *Thaïs*: hatred of superstition, hatred of asceticism: both are expressed with more engaging frankness in the *Rôtisserie* (i.e., cookshop) at the sign of *Queen Pédauque*. There again the style is not spontaneous, but a transcription, a sustained imitation. But the eighteenth century is so perfectly familiar to Anatole France, so absolutely in harmony with his tastes and opinions, that we are not irked with the consciousness of artifice. The slight archaism of the language is a constant delight. Jacques Ménétrier, who tells the story, is the son of a worthy *rôtisseur*, at the sign of *Queen Webfoot*, or *Pédauque*. That glorious *rôtisserie*, where serried ranks of chickens and other fowls would slowly turn to rich amber, on a background of glowing rubies, whilst a delicious fragrance

* The influence of Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint-Anthony* on *Thaïs* is obvious. *The Temptation* is as unconvincing as *Thaïs*; and, much more ambitious, it is by no means so perfect.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

filled the warm, substantial air—we can see it, feel it, smell it, inhale its atmosphere of jolly, homy comfort. When I am in a certain hungry, lazy mood, I cannot help dreaming of the *rôtisseries* that used to be so numerous in Paris.* A *rôtisserie* would be an ideal place to spend eternity in—provided you were not too near the coals. In comes His Reverence Jérôme Coignard, one of the adventurous, disreputable priests so frequent in real life at the time. Abbé Prévost, the author of *Manon Lescaut*, is a good authentic specimen of the type, and the scene of much of *The Rôtisserie* is laid in the same surroundings as *Manon*. Coignard is an epicure, when he gets a chance; and there is hardly any vow or commandment that he has not broken, or, at least, badly cracked. Fat, florid, with rubicund nose and triple chin, greasy cassock and shoes down at heels, he has preserved in his misfortunes a great cheerfulness and equanimity of spirit, a wonderful love for scholarship and literature, and a faith of strictest orthodoxy. But, of a paradoxical turn of mind, he defends the Church with weapons

* They have almost disappeared from the French capital, but seem to be thriving in New York.

ANATOLE FRANCE

snatched from her arch-enemy. Like Montaigne, he delights in confounding human reason by the spectacle of its infirmity and endless contradictions; and, if we knew him not, on his own profession, for an obedient son of the Church, we might easily mistake him for a dangerous sceptic—like Anatole France himself. In him are compounded the appetites and frailties of Sir John Falstaff; the philosophy of Montaigne; the wit of Voltaire; the dignity, or, if you prefer, the pedantry of a college professor; and the unctuous homiletics of the priest. Abbé Coignard is the life and delight of the work. But the minor characters, Friar Ange, Catherine the Lacemaker, Astarac the Astrologer, are sketched with wonderful verve. Conversations, as ever in Anatole France, are the very marrow of the book: but the fantastic, realistic, or ironical episodes are told with singular felicity. There is no plot: but there is a thread that runs through the story.* *The Rôtisserie* is by no

* The importance of that narrative element can be gauged by comparing *The Rôtisserie* with its sequel, *Opinions of Jérôme Coignard*: isolated from his familiar background and from his old associates, philosophizing and never acting, the priestly Pyrrhonian is far less convincing and far less delightful.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

means edifying, and I am afraid I should have to place it on the Index Expurgatorius. But like Racine at Port-Royal, if I had to give up the book, I would first learn it by heart.

In *The Red Lily* there is little trace of the destructive irony so evident in *The Rôtisserie* and *Jérôme Coignard*: the work of dissolution is complete. The heroes of the novel are, so far as art, culture, social graces are concerned, the supreme flowers of a very old civilization. Yet, in their perfect freedom from prejudices—which you might prefer to call scruples and principles—they are the children of primitive nature, just as much as Rarahu, Loti's child-bride in Tahiti. They have undone the slow ethical work of centuries. They live in a state of satisfied *amorality* almost akin to innocence. And the dangerous magic of Anatole France's art is such that we too forget, for the time being, the conventions, the superstitions, the laws, that the characters have so completely brushed aside.

Thérèse Martin-Bellême and Dechartre love each other. But when Dechartre learns that Thérèse has previously loved another man, Le Mesnil, some deep remnant of selfishness and ferocity is stirred up in him; he torments Thérèse

ANATOLE FRANCE

and himself with his incurable retrospective jealousy, and finally drives her away. Thérèse is consistent throughout: a child of this world, her one rule of conduct is to be herself, to follow her instinct and practise no deceit. Dechartre is more complicated; he lives on two planes, or in two epochs, at the same time. His own actions cannot be justified except under an anarchistic code of ethics—if that phrase is not too Hibernian; yet his jealousy is the sign of a craving for ownership, which harks back to the times when a human being was not a free agent, but a piece of chattel: "Thy neighbour's house, thy neighbour's wife, his manservant, his maid-servant, his ox, his ass, or anything that is thy neighbour's." At any rate, he is sincere, and does not interpose any so-called principle or law between instinct and action.

The Red Lily is in many respects unique among the works of Anatole France. Its style is absolutely simple and direct. In *Sylvestre Bonnard*, in *The Book of my Friend*, in *Contemporary History*, there is a blend of archaism, solemnity, and irony, which is delightful, but in which art is apparent. *The Rôtisserie*, and later, *Penguin Island*, are marvellous imitations

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of the eighteenth century; *Thaïs*, *St. Clara's Well*, are pieces of literary jewellery, elaborately chiselled and softly glittering; here, style, in his absolute perfection, disappears. It seems as though anyone could have written *The Red Lily*, but, in comparison, even the pellucid prose of Jules Lemaître has flaws, and a faint veil of mist.

Conversations, as in all the works of Anatole France, are of great importance: but they are more intimately linked with the characters and with the action than in *Queen Pédauque*. The episodal personages, Miss Bell, the English poetess, Choulette, a lifelike, affectionately-humorous portrait of Verlaine, can never be forgotten.* Admirably rendered is the atmosphere of the two cities, Paris and Florence, the latter especially, adorable in its circle of hills moulded and tinted by a God who must have been an artist. *The Red Lily* is the symbol of Florence; it is also the symbol of Dechartre's love—its refinement, its lack of supreme white purity, the cruelty that underlies it. For this is almost the only book in which Anatole France

* Much less successful is Paul Vence, a compound of Bourget and France himself.

ANATOLE FRANCE

has attempted to describe passion. The love of Dechartre and Thérèse is purely sensual: but it is neither vulgar nor frivolous. There is no touch of the bantering cynicism found in *The Rôtisserie*, and which became almost a disease in the latter part of Anatole France's career. In this respect *The Red Lily* deserves to rank with the masterpieces of Guy de Maupassant, with *As Strong as Death*, for example.

§ 4. THE ETHICS OF THE AVERAGE SENSUAL MAN.

Critique of all objective criteria—Tolerance and enlightenment—Hedonistic sociability—Love and the morality of the eighteenth century.

It is not without misgivings that we turn from the art to the ethics of *The Red Lily*. The ethics of *The Red Lily*! Snakes in Iceland! Thank Heaven, Anatole France is no Paul Bourget. Why not be satisfied with what he has to offer—a work of truth and beauty, which depicts human life serenely, and neither attacks nor preaches any Decalogue? Morality has no more to do with it than with the lilies in the field.

No one likes to be called a Philistine or a

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Pharisee; and the doctrine of art for art's sake is allowed to pass unchallenged by men who, in their inmost heart, believe that, in nine cases out of ten, it is a piece of blatant sophistry. Art is not nature, neither is it science; there is no such thing as perfect objectivity in art—not even in photography, least of all in literature. And among French writers Anatole France is by no means the most objective. Theophile Gautier may have been an exquisite organism for the enjoyment of the external world, and nothing more: Anatole France, at fifty, could not be credited with such holy simplicity: he is not innocent of thought. Silence is an opinion; there are sins of omission as well as commission, and France's negative attitude towards orthodox morality is explicit enough. And, in this respect, *The Red Lily* is more significant than such a book as *The Opinions of Jérôme Coignard*. In *Jérôme Coignard* there is a strong element of wilful paradox and irony. In *The Red Lily* we have France's conception of the world. unconsciously, and therefore faithfully, mirrored. Quiet self-assurance is a more challenging attitude than impassioned defiance. When H. G. Wells left the domain of scientific fantasy for

ANATOLE FRANCE.

that of problem fiction, his heroes propounded not a few staggering opinions about love and marriage. But they did so—he did so—in an ill-assured voice, grotesquely loud at times, and suddenly choked with anguish. You could easily recognize the conservative moralist who was drifting from his moorings into uncharted reaches. Anatole France has gone far beyond that stage. He is a man—and writes, in the main, for a public—for whom old-fashioned morality no longer exists. No need for him to criticize or to preach: he *is*. To see him so calm, so strong, so superior is, in itself a demonstration. It is impossible to be a whole-hearted admirer of *The Red Lily* without attuning oneself to the author's state of mind. Even a Puritan should be able to enjoy the art of that wonderful tale: but there is more in it than art, and France himself would be loth to smuggle his opinions into any man's brains. If we are ready to agree with Anatole France, let us know why; if we differ from him, let us say so.

But what can we do? It would be unfair to condemn one system simply in the name of another: anyway, two can play at that game. Perhaps the best method would be to follow

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

each one separately, as mathematicians follow up Euclidian and non-Euclidian geometries; we should watch for the first inner absurdity, for the first flagrant contradiction with established facts, that would reveal the fallacy lurking in either; perhaps their ultimate agreement or conclusive discord would remain beyond our ken: then we would have to accept their parallel existence as a fact: one of the riddles of the universe. There is no need for us to expound or criticize what we may call standard morality: we all have at least a bowing acquaintance with its tenets. The rival scheme that we are now considering may be less familiar to the Anglo-Saxon reader; it is not peculiar to Anatole France; it was professed by Voltaire, by Molière, by Montaigne, by Rabelais, and by no small proportion of their most enlightened contemporaries. Yet it would be wrong to call it "French morality": France has had other, and greater, prophets than these. It is the ethics of "the average sensual man."

The first article in that scheme is that there is no objective criterion of right and wrong. You adduce an external authority, Revelation: Anatole France will rehearse, with a weary

ANATOLE FRANCE

smile of courteous irony, the old trusty arguments of Voltairianism. There are rival revelations; every one abounds in inner conflicts. Sacred books were written down, compiled, transmitted, translated, interpreted, by fallible men, so that neither the canon of inspired writings, nor the text of individual passages, stand beyond cavil at the present day. Few Christians are consistent enough to defend the literal inspiration of their Scriptures: even for the orthodox, those parts of the Bible are dead that no longer agree with modern sentiment: private and human opinion is therefore supreme. We no longer accept the Decalogue because Moses brought it down from Sinai: we praise Moses for bringing a Decalogue that we can still accept after so many thousand years. In other words, we believe in ourselves, not in Moses.

Tradition, naturally, is ruled out of court. Tradition is the force of inertia, nothing more. Descant on its holiness: back come the Voltairian sneers: Prejudice, superstition! Tradition does not count in science: there, all theories command a purely provisional allegiance; they are naught but working hypotheses; they may at any moment be submitted to a new test and dis-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

proved. Even the multiplication table is open to revision.

As for universal consent, it is a will-o'-the-wisp. There is no universal consent: there is a consensus of the majority, "mostly fools," said Carlyle. To be in the minority does not prove *ipso facto* that you are right: some minorities are only the tail of a bygone majority; others are mere false starts, that lead nowhither. But Socrates and Jesus were in the minority. On the other hand, polygamy, idolatry, slavery, belief in witchcraft, and every wild delusion of the human mind were once as universally endorsed as war and capitalism in the world of yesterday—or to-day? The "good of the greatest number" is another form of the same criterion. The radical individualist may say: "What care I for the greatest number?" The aristocratic philosopher will say: "Not the good of the greatest number, but the highest development of the chosen few, is the goal of human endeavour." And who is to determine "the good of the greatest number"? Ultimately the greatest number themselves. This may be an inevitable compromise: it is not an ideal. The conformist may be a moral man: but greater still

ANATOLE FRANCE

is the prophet who rises against the abuses and prejudices of the day—against what the deluded majority consider their “greatest good.”

There remains conscience: an uneven-handed criterion, according to which the scrupulous man will torment his soul to death for a peccadillo, whilst the brute will rape and kill, and sleep the slumber of the just. Whatever may be the essence of conscience, its contents are the epitome of human experience, the result of race, tradition, and surroundings, the embodiment of prejudice. Prejudices may be right as well as wrong; but they are not infallible. A conscientious Protestant will eat meat on Good Friday without a qualm. A conscientious naval officer will send to the bottom a shipful of women and children. A conscientious Dukhobor or Quaker will refuse to obey his country's supremest command.

Morality, in the eyes of the orthodox, partook of the sacredness of religion and of the definiteness of science. After passing through the fire of Voltairian criticism, it is shorn of both these attributes. Nothing remains but a loose accumulation of precedents and conventions, a writhing mass of shadowy absurdities, the Great

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Böig, formidable in its ubiquitous shapelessness. Look more closely : you will discern two monsters within the cloud—Fanaticism and Ignorance.

Self-righteous fanatics—Torquemada in the name of Christ, Robespierre in the name of democracy and virtue, the Kaiser in the name of the Fatherland and Culture—have caused more blood to be shed than all common murderers put together. And lives without number have been darkened by the nameless terror, that, even in its milder moods, fanaticism spreads over the land: lovers kept apart, brothers estranged, races or classes doomed to eternal humiliation, thought warped or checked, noble fancies clipped and caged. The baiting of heretics, insidious and relentless, goes on under our very eyes. The remedy is tolerance. But tolerance is the sceptic's virtue. The earnest believer may wish to deal gently with erring brethren—the Inquisition urged the secular arm to treat them "misericorditer"—yet he must be firm, and stern, if sternness be needed. If he knows the truth, he must be ready to die for the truth, and he must not balk at inflicting death, that truth may prevail. What are individual lives compared to eternal verities? Thus are the

ANATOLE FRANCE

stake, the scaffold, and the battlefield justified. The sceptic, on the contrary, will say: "What are our poor little human opinions, that we should kill or even torment a living being for their sake?" He wishes to live and let live, whatever may be his neighbour's faith, nation, race, class, political allegiance, or private code of ethics. If the aim of virtue were to spare misery, no virtue would rank so high as tolerance. It is negative, and can hardly be termed heroic. Yet, in Voltaire, it amounted to a positive passion—we might almost say to fanaticism. And, in the case of Anatole France himself, it was soon to become the source of noble deeds.

Fanaticism is the result of stupidity rather than of wickedness, and can be corrected by enlightenment rather than by direct sermonizing. President Poincaré is not likely to be canonized, like Louis IX.: yet he does not order the eyes of heretics to be put out. He is not better: he knows better. Every prejudice, every superstition that crumbles down, leaves man more humane. This process is not infallible in individual cases: evil passions may survive their intellectual justification; but, in a large way, it works well. When a nation emerges from

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

dense ignorance, it is liberated from the vague terrors of the night, and from the cruelty born of fear. A refined intellect, a quick sympathy, are more essential to enlightenment than a mass of information. These are social qualities. France, like Voltaire, refuses to fall down and worship primitive innocence: primitive man was a brute. And a learned barbarian is a more dangerous barbarian. Enlightenment, "sweetness and light," are to be sought in the commerce of gentle men and women, rather than in the forest primeval, or in the efficient workshops where Ph.D.'s are made.

Orthodox morality is rooted in pessimism: man cannot be trusted to work out his own salvation; essentially depraved, he needs a system of checks and rewards to keep him in the straight and narrow path. Some Utopians, and Rousseau himself, have faith in human nature: set it free, and it will find its way back to Eden. Anatole France is neither an optimist nor a pessimist, nor yet, like George Eliot, a "meliorist." He is—what shall we say?—a "mediocrist." Man can never be quite so good or quite so bad as he tries to: in six thousand years, he has not managed to invent an eighth deadly

ANATOLE FRANCE

sin. Remove abuses when they become flagrant, by all means; but do not expect the millennium. Be careful lest, in the place of an old and effete superstition, you install another superstition, brand-new, assertive, and seven times worse than the first. Be gentle in tearing down harmless delusions: for the great majority, those delusions alone make life worth living; and if philosophers did not have the spectacle of the folly of others for their entertainment, they would soon die of ennui.

There is no aim in life but the quest of pleasure: that gospel of "the average sensual man," the American Constitution, calls it the pursuit of happiness. We have no right to say that one form of pleasure is, in itself, higher or better than another; but man is a gregarious animal; he finds society more comfortable than isolation, and those pleasures are most desirable which tend to the consolidation instead of the disruption of society. Morality—civilization—sociability—civility: all these terms blend into one another. For Anatole France as well as for Confucius, a code of ethics is merely a code of politeness. The one great virtue is *savoir-vivre*. A man is measured by his taste.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

There is fierce joy in battle: but battle is antisocial. With growing enlightenment, from bouts with the stone axe we have evolved fencing with capped foils: a faint flavour of conflict has been retained in a polite meeting for mutual enjoyment. In the same way, wordy war, dispute, becomes conversation; the verbal dart, retort, loses its sting and becomes repartee. Such indeed seems the general line of progress: the transformation of struggle into sport. The same law applies to love. Love, in Anatole France's mind, is a primitive passion, a wild impulse. The days—not so far removed—when the males fought for the possession of the females, and when rape was the acknowledged form of wooing, have left their mark in the recesses of our hearts. Love, like war, in its sombre violence, is antisocial. It has to be tamed, humanized, civilized. Here again, battle must be turned into sport. The spirit of conquest and ownership must yield to that of free and mutual enjoyment.

Thus arose the "morality" of the eighteenth century, with its well-bred tolerance and its exquisite Marivaudage. This "morality" Anatole France frankly endorses. Only he is aware

ANATOLE FRANCE

of the fact that, even in the most refined circles, it has not reached its point of perfection. There are men like Dechartre who suddenly refuse to play the game—like spoilt children who stamp and shriek because they are not winning.

The obvious lesson is that exclusiveness and jealousy are antisocial, selfish, and should be discountenanced. Had Le Mesnil politely bowed when Thérèse gave him his dismissal; had Dechartre recognized that she was free, that he had no claim either upon her past or upon her future: all would have been well. This is the moral of the story, according to the logic of France's thought.

But *The Red Lily* is not a book with a thesis; it is the work of a candid observer; and, like life itself, it allows of a variety of interpretations. Anatole France does not condemn Le Mesnil and Dechartre. He pities them, as much as he pities Thérèse. And we are led to question whether, according to Anatole France's own showing, the code of delicate urbanity that he has propounded can stand the shock of an eternal reality, such as love. Tame, humanize, civilize love as you will: at the first tremor he will burst asunder your gossamer chains.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Throughout the book can be felt a strange, nostalgic love for Love—the pure, the terrible, primitive and eternal. But love cannot abide with those who would fain turn him into a rosy Cupid of the Pompadour period. They are unworthy, and are left empty-hearted. The closing pages of *The Red Lily* are sombre. There you have a man and a woman, rich, young, refined. Pleasure is their gospel. They try to love, they yearn for Love: they cannot find joy. Heroes and readers are left with an ashy taste in their mouths.

And we cannot help wondering whether Truth is to be found in the glittering candlelight of a Voltairian salon, or in the wind-swept open fields, under the stars.

CHAPTER III

ANATOLE FRANCE: THE DREYFUS
CASE AND AFTER

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ANATOLE FRANCE: THE DREYFUS CASE AND AFTER.

WE have attempted to sketch the career of Anatole France up to 1897. Zola, with his massive epic of disease and filth, *The Rougon-Macquart*, with his enormous sales, his noisy popularity, the constant controversies in which he was engaged, his assumption of leadership and his dogmatic theorizing, still occupied the centre of the literary stage. Pierre Loti had appealed more deeply than Zola to a more refined circle of readers, and, once at least, had reached as wide a public with his *Iceland Fisherman*. But Anatole France was already recognized as the foremost artist of the day. Innocent, delicate and tender in *The Book of my Friend*, kindly humorous in *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, a virtuoso of colour and music in *Thaïs*, a master of lively narrative, picturesque incident, and sparkling irony in *The Rôtisserie of Queen Pédauque*, grave, poetical, soberly elo-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

quent in *The Garden of Epicurus*, strong and direct in *The Red Lily*, rising without effect from the level of cultured conversation to the tragic heights of sensual passion—a poet, a scholar, a critic as well as a novelist, Anatole France had covered nearly the whole gamut of literature. In tastes and prepossessions, both artistic and political, he might have been called a “ conservative anarchist ”—one of those men who have no belief in the sanctity of authority and tradition, yet freely conform to their dictates, because those dictates happen to suit their individual fancy. France, for instance, would have been glad to extend a hand of welcome to “ the literature of To-Morrow ” heralded by Charles Morice: but he remained imbued with the spirit and style of the classical masters, Greek, Latin and French. He showed no trace of the snobbishness with which Barrès and especially Bourget have been charged; but he enjoyed luxury and the amenities of life; his Villa Said was a museum of precious and beautiful things; and he consorted by choice with people of wealth and culture. Fanaticism he abhorred: but he seemed to dislike and fear the new-fangled, unspent fanaticism of revolu-

ANATOLE FRANCE

tionists, more than the mellowed and comparatively innocuous fanaticism of the champions of the past. He had started with universal irony, leading to universal indulgence, as preached by Renan, and summed up in the maxim: "A sin comprehended is a sin forgiven." The gentle humour of his early books, which smiled at the foibles and eccentricities of men, had gradually dissociated into irony and pity; then it seemed as though pity were receding and vanishing: in the mind of Jérôme Coignard, naught was left but amused contempt. Customs, institutions, philosophies and creeds—all are equally laughable: what is man that he should believe he has found a rule less delusive than his senses, less fragile than his reason, less unstable than his own heart? Thus we are left in a world whence all dogmatic notions have been swept away. Nothing remains but the "What do I know?" of Montaigne, which easily becomes "What do I care?"; the "Fais que voudras" (Do as you please), which was the fundamental law of Thélème; and the two alternating notes in Ecclesiastes: "Eat, drink, and be merry," "All is vanity."

Such was the man: a writer of established

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

reputation, a radical sceptic, a delicate epicure, and fifty-three years old. Duty seemed to have no definite meaning for him; it is but the last idol, the faint unsubstantial shadow of receding theism. Comfort, pleasure, on the contrary, are tangible: "pleasure, the one thing as certain as Death." Imagine such a man confronted with a moral and social problem, which, mind you, does not affect his own comfort in the least. How easy it were for him to avert his eyes, to ignore the question, to remain blandly neutral! How much easier still would it be to pour his shafts of unerring sarcasm, right and left, upon those coarse-witted men who take life seriously, who think that justice, truth, the fatherland, religion, are more than empty names, are worth fighting and dying for! Up, Jérôme Coignard, and tell us once more that there is nothing certain in the world but the enjoyment of good books, good wine, and the smiles of Catherine the Lacemaker! But Jérôme Coignard remained in his grave by the hillside on the Lyons road; and in his stead appeared Professor Lucien Bergeret, champion, and, if need be, martyr, of justice.

ANATOLE FRANCE

§ 1. PROVINCIAL LIFE.

The Elm on the Mall—The Church of the Concordat—Abbé Lantaigne—Anatole France's anticlericalism.

The Dreyfus case brought about in France an extraordinary revaluation of all values. The historian of morals, I believe, will do well to study that crisis as a searching test on an unexampled scale. In that electric storm, the two rival conceptions of human life and conduct were polarized almost at once, and with striking definiteness. The first of these conceptions stands for formal discipline, for virtue as the accomplishment of duty, for duty as the fulfilment of the law, for the law as the expression of a supreme will. It rests upon the belief that there is a Truth, primitive, immutable, divine, revealed from above and miraculously transmitted. It is the religion of authority, of orthodoxy, of tradition. The other recognizes no authority but the individual conscience; traditions it calls superstitions and prejudices; outward, compulsory discipline is sheer tyranny; orthodoxy is an attempt, long hateful, now futile, to shackle the mind and soul of man; duty

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

is but a convention; like other conventions, it is respectable only in so far as it is freely consented to and reciprocally binding; it must have rights for its correlatives. This is the religion of individual liberty.

Now, it is evident that both may be abused for selfish motives. The religion of liberty is invoked by whoever wants to shirk unpleasant obligations; the religion of authority is called upon to preserve convenient privileges that have long ceased to be defensible in the light of reason. But, on the whole, the advantage rests with the religion of authority. On its side are to be found the rich, the learned, the well-born, the self-righteous, all those who have attained their goal and staked their claim; it controls Church, government, and social organization; it controls, more than we are willing to confess, the schools themselves, and moulds the minds of the young generation. It is established and respectable. It can pour odium and contempt upon the libertarians. On the one hand, the pillars of society; on the other, the rabble of free-thinkers, free-lovers, infidels, blasphemers, iconoclasts, anarchists, and what not: take your choice.

Then arose in France a paradoxical situation,

ANATOLE FRANCE

the scandal of contemporary history: liberty wrestling with authority in ethical battle, and winning the fight. A man, Captain Dreyfus, had been convicted for the crime of another. Originally it was naught but an error. The man protests, in terms that ring true; his family, a few friends—not all of them his co-religionists—have faith in him and attempt to defend him; a few outsiders, moderate, conservative men, a prominent lawyer, an old Alsatian senator, the colonel in charge of his military jail, take up the cry. Once more, it is a mistake, humiliating to confess, but not damning; tragic enough for the victim, yet not irreparable. The man is alive, and his opinions are those of his tormentors: he is, like them, a conservative, a capitalist, a patriot. But the man is a Jew, and Edouard Drumont has for years been filling the Catholic imagination with horrific tales of Jewish occult power. In the first campaign of Dreyfus's friends, the army leaders see nothing but an attempt of the sect to save one of its members. Swayed by their antisemitic prejudice, they close their eyes to evidence. But public opinion awakens; the crisis grows in intensity; the conservative leaders clearly detect in the agitation

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

a plot on the part of the enemies of France for the ruin of her army. Then the whole of France is swept by the storm, the whole world feels its fierce breath: the conservatives are confirmed in their belief that all the forces of destruction, the hosts of Antichrist, are arrayed against them. They are now defending their altars and their hearths. They know that they are right: are not their enemies the enemies of Property, and the Fatherland, and the Church—the enemies of God? And when the devilish ingenuity of the Dreyfusists is able to pounce upon some technical flaw in their defence—upon the lack of documentary evidence, for instance—why, they will not allow the cause of law and order to suffer defeat on account of such a formal trifle. If documents are wanted, they will be provided—that is to say, they will be forged. It is a forgery but in appearance, a “patriotic” forgery, a white lie, for the fabricated pieces represent what the Anti-Dreyfusists *know* to be the truth. They are fiduciary money, banknotes of no intrinsic value, lies if you like to call them so, but lies which stand for a gold reserve of truth. And how do they know that the truth is there, invisible to human eyes, compelled to manifest

ANATOLE FRANCE

itself only through lies? Why, are they not, they the conservatives, the capitalists, the orthodox, are they not the appointed owners and keepers of the truth? If the truth were not with them, what would be the meaning of Church and State? Then the vault is forced open—and found empty.

The Dreyfus case is the key to the whole literary life of Anatole France after 1897. On the one hand were arrayed the Army, the Church, Capital; on the other, Free-Thought and Socialism. Anatole France had always been, even in his days of kindest, almost reverent humour, a very free thinker indeed: under the influence of the crisis he became more and more of an aggressive anticlerical, and finally a professed Socialist. It is this evolution that we can trace in the series of articles which he contributed to *Le Figaro*, now collected into the four volumes of his *Contemporary History*.* These articles are of a kind which baffles definition. They may consist of a descriptive sketch, with some of the elements of the short story; oftener, they are a commentary, and mostly a satire, on

* *The Elm on the Mall, The Dressmaker's Form, The Amethyst Ring, M. Bergeret in Paris.*

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

current events; a certain thread, lacking in *The Opinions of Jérôme Coignard*, connects the different instalments, so that they may be considered as the chapters of a loose, rambling novel. The readers of the *Figaro* provided the right kind of a public for Anatole France: the paper, frivolous enough to please the cosmopolitan, pleasure-seeking society of Paris, was not devoid of culture, and had a reputation for good style and wit; it was conservative, but not committed like *Le Gaulois* to the unswerving support of the monarchical cause; outwardly respectable, yet without any prudish objection to pimento and Cayenne pepper in fiction. The easy method of composition was admirably suitable to the talent of Anatole France: exquisite in polite *causerie*, he has seldom shown himself capable of developing a definite plot or a formal argument. The episcopal ambitions of Abbé Guitrel form the apparent connection between the different episodes—at least in the first three volumes; but in the life, character, and opinions of Professor Lucien Bergeret lies the chief interest.

The first volume, *The Elm on the Mall*, is unique as a description of provincial life.

ANATOLE FRANCE

Honoré de Balzac had left several masterpieces of that kind, and *Mme. Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert, is one of the epoch-making books in the nineteenth century; but this vein had become more and more neglected in French fiction. Brittany and the Basque countries, described by Loti, are not provincial in the usual sense of the term, but foreign: they are strange and primitive little nations within ten hours' ride from Paris. Peasant life is not "provincial" either. It has its romantic charm, so different from the feverishness of the capital. But life in a French country town is a byword for stupidity: dull prejudices, parochial interests, petty rivalries, paltry intrigues, small scandals: these, with assiduous church-going and fruit-preserving in season, make up the daily routine, year in, year out, as tedious as a twice-told tale. Add a wistful and resentful recognition of Parisian leadership, expressed in a belated, half-hearted or excessive imitation of Parisian moods and fashions. Such at least is the impression that provincial life makes on Parisian exiles. The picture may be overdrawn. Yet it is a fact that on account of the agelong supremacy of the capital, and as a result of the cen-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

tralizing policy of King, Jacobine and Emperor alike, all but a few of the major cities in France have been devitalized; they have lost the influence that cities of corresponding size still enjoy in England, Germany, Italy, and America.

Now, Anatole France, a Parisian to the very marrow of his bones, describes for us that timid, sluggish, benumbed existence with extraordinary powers of sympathy. In his book, all the elements of provincial society live and move with convincing naturalness. There is the Prefect, Worms-Clavelin, a professional politician, easy-going, selfish, sceptical, a Jew who is hand and glove with the clerical party, which very properly despises him whilst making use of him; General Cartier de Chalmot, methodical, unobtrusive, henpecked, simple-hearted as a child; the bluff and kindly old Doctor who "makes up" as a country squire; M. de Terremondre, a gentleman of the lesser nobility, with some affectation of elegance and culture; Mazure, the Keeper of Archives, a bilious Jacobin; the town flirt and toast, Mme. de Gromance; the Rector and Professors of the University; the tradespeople and the servants; and even the harmless, half-witted tramp, Pied-d'Alouette,

ANATOLE FRANCE

a child of nature and unconscious philosopher. Most precious of all, in themselves, and from the documentary point of view, are the sketches of clerical life. They depict a Church which has passed away, unregretted by friend or foe: the mediocre, lukewarm Church issued from the Concordat. Associated for the sake of convenience and pelf with a State which she despised, and which in turn distrusted her; paying lip-service to the Republic, whilst ineffectually regretting the régimes whose downfall she had hastened, she had but one desire, that of avoiding any conflict which might endanger her enormous wealth and her somnolent peace. The purifying breath of battle, the call to self-sacrifice, has passed over the liberated Church of France; faith and hope, and perhaps even charity, are filling again the soul of her priests: Aristide Briand may be canonized yet. Of the Church Somnolent, the old Archbishop, Cardinal Charlot, is the symbol; but there is also a representative of the true Church Militant, Abbé Lantaigne, the austere, uncompromising Director of the Theological Seminary. Professor Bergeret, the doubter, and Abbé Lantaigne, the dogmatist, respect and appreciate

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

each other. The scholar admires the candour, the logic, and the learning of the priest; the priest recognizes in Bergeret a keen, well-informed mind, who knows the importance of religious problems and can follow a syllogism. Neither can conceal his contempt for the utter frivolity, the jellified intellect, of his respective colleagues. The discussions between Lantaigne and Bergeret, under the neutral favourable shade of the Elm on the Mall, are carried on with old-world leisure and formality; delightful for the serious reader, they are lucid and witty enough to retain the attention of the average subscriber to *Le Figaro*. If Abbé Lantaigne has but a qualified admiration for his superiors, they return the compliment in kind; and when the See of Tourcoing becomes vacant, Church and State unite to favour Lantaigne's diplomatic, unctuous, fashionable rival, Abbé Guitrel. Abbé Lantaigne calls on the Archbishop to enlist his support; the Archbishop is particularly anxious not to commit himself. He is no friend of Lantaigne's and neither wishes for, nor believes in, his success: but the austere theologian is endorsed by some of the most sincere and quietly prominent Catholics in the diocese.

ANATOLE FRANCE

So His Grace shirks the difficulty by side-tracking Lantaigne on to his favourite subject, liturgical history. He has an embarrassing case ready for him: a man has been found hanging between the outer and the inner doors of the Church of St. Exupère: is the church to be considered desecrated? Is it to be purified and rededicated, and if so, according to what rites? Lantaigne easily falls into the trap: was the suicide found on the Gospel side, or on that of the Epistle? Was any part of his body projecting through the door into the nave? And on he goes, for an hour, discussing fine points, adducing precedents, a formidable array of authorities, the Holy Writ, the Fathers, the Councils. . . . He is dismissed, quivering still with his own eloquence and learning—the aim of his visit unfulfilled and forgotten. In the street he chances upon the venerable Rector of St. Exupère, placidly purchasing cork stoppers for his wine bottles; and from those innocent lips he learns of the trick that has been played upon him. “That man will never say the truth,” he exclaims in his wrath, “except at the altar, when he confesses: ‘Domine, non sum dignus!’”

There is in *The Elm on the Mall* an episode.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

which has given rise to different interpretations. Firmin Piedagnel is a student in the Theological Seminary; of humble origin, somewhat weakly and timid, gentle and delicate, he has a keen appreciation of literature and art, unique among his rustic companions; and he has an inborn love for the sheltered, quiet dignity of the priestly life, for the charm and beauty of religious ceremonies. Never has he felt that haunting, spiritual, and even sensuous appeal of the Church more deeply than on the day when he was summoned to serve the Director's Mass—a special favour. Abbé Lantaigne loves the lad; that affection is one of the few personal feelings that the self-mortifying priest has not rooted out of his heart. But he sees that Piedagnel is a pupil of Chateaubriand and Renan; that he loves religion, not because it is true, but because it is beautiful. He has some sort of voluptuous religiosity: of faith, the rigid, unquestioning faith alone worthy of the name, not a trace. And Lantaigne, helped by prayer, dismisses his favourite pupil. Then, “Piedagnel felt rising and growing within him a sentiment which upheld him and strengthened him—hatred for the priests, an imperishable

ANATOLE FRANCE

and fruitful hatred, a hatred such as would fill his whole life. Without a word, he left the room." Now, there is in those words a strange note of passionate sincerity, rare in Anatole France. The state of mind of Piedagnel before he received the news of his dismissal was evidently akin to the experience of Anatole France himself; and by bringing together this passage and other autobiographical notes,* some critics have come to the conclusion that Anatole France had ever hated priests; that the fierce anticlericalism of his socialistic period was but the revelation of an inborn sentiment concealed from the world for thirty long years. If such were the case, his powers of dissimulation would be even greater than his mastery of style. It is of course the interest of conservative writers to prove that France's anticlericalism was a blind passion rather than a reasoned opinion. But it is singularly dangerous to interpret so narrowly every passage in a work of fiction that happens to have an autobiographical ring. Anatole France is not Piedagnel, any more than he is Sylvestre Bonnard, Jérôme Coignard, Bergeret,

* *E.g.*, some in *The Desires of Jean Servien*, a mediocre early novel.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

or Brotteaux des Islettes. We may note that at the very moment when the dismissed scholar becomes conscious of that hatred unquenchable, the author shows us Lantaigne at his best: stern no doubt, yet tender, full of love for the youth whom his plain duty as a religious director compels him to drive away. The truth seems to be that the germs of conflicting sentiments had always coexisted in the subtle mind of Anatole France. He may have despised certain priests; he liked and admired many. He had at least a taste for the Catholic religion. Now it is true that religion soon proved to be a great disillusion to him: he never quite felt what he had hoped to feel; and a source of disillusion may easily be called a delusion. The doctrines of the Church were the constant condemnation of his own habits of thought and life: hence a feeling of growing hostility, veiled so long as the Church seemed less threatening than mob-violence. The germs of the conflict were sown early—as early as his college course at Stanislas; they did not raise their heads above ground until 1890; and when the Dreyfus case broke out, the crop was ripe and ready to be garnered. By a dramatic ellipse, Anatole France has concentrated within

ANATOLE FRANCE

one morning, in the soul of Piedagnel, the evolution which, in his own case, had covered thirty or forty years.

§ 2. ANATOLE FRANCE AND THE DREYFUS CASE.

Authority and Liberty—*The Dressmaker's Form*—*The Amethyst Ring*—*M. Bergeret in Paris*.

In *The Dressmaker's Form*, the second volume of the series, Lantaigne and Guitrel recede into the background, and the conjugal misfortunes of M. Bergeret occupy the centre of the stage. The political notes, too, harbingers of the gathering storm, are more clearly heard. M. Bergeret, assistant professor of Latin literature, is a pathetic compound of clear-sightedness, longings, and impotence. He is distinguished, yet a failure. Like Voltaire, like Anatole France himself, he would fain enjoy luxury and the company of fair women: but he is poor, slight of build, bilious, short-sighted, hopelessly academic in appearance, ill at ease in his shiny dress suit. Madame de Gromance, the myriad-hearted, who has a kindly nod for every one of her innumerable admirers, spurns the homage of his timid smile. When the frayed buttonholes of his dress shirt

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

refuse to perform their functions any more, and part company with the studs, he feels a pang of genuine despair: for this humble domestic event is but the symbol of his constant and dull failure. In his profession, he is not appreciated; the enmity of his President has exiled him into a dark and damp lecture-room in the basement, whilst the fashionable professor of mathematics charms the ladies of the town in the main auditorium. He has contracted a marriage—of the kind which French irony calls “marriages of convenience”—with a woman whose soul has ever been vulgar, and now reveals itself in the increasing coarseness of her body. Madame Bergeret is the daughter of Pouilly the Lexicographer, and that is a title of nobility in the academic world; she has always considered her union with Lucien Bergeret as a *mésalliance*. His study at home is as depressing as his classroom in college: it is an odd-shaped space left behind the bulging round wall of the staircase; it is encumbered with Mme. Bergeret’s dress-maker’s form, a constant reminder of a presence which has long ceased to be welcome, either in wicker-work or in the flesh. Bergeret is a Frederic Amiel: a keen analytical mind with no

ANATOLE FRANCE

commensurate powers of reconstruction, and thus struck with a sort of paralysis. He seeks comfort in paradoxes which puzzle and horrify his literal wife and his downright President. He has but few friends: an Italian collector of medals, with whom he keeps up a scholarly correspondence; Abbé Lantaigne, at the opposite pole of thought, and with whom intimacy is out of the question; and M. Roux, his favourite pupil, now serving his time in the army. M. Bergeret discovers that Mme. Bergeret and M. Roux have deeper interests in common than Roman epigraphy or the *Vergilius Nauticus*. When this momentous revelation is forced upon him, his first impulse is the savage, primitive instinct to kill; the second is to retire into his study, where it takes him exactly ninety minutes to recover his equanimity. The only victim is the wicker dressmaker's form, which is expelled from the study, and symbolically thrown out of the window. Now M. Bergeret is master in his own house: the next task is to expel, by less forcible means, a being whom he has never loved, and for whom he no longer feels any moral responsibility. He simply ignores her; he considers her as empty space. Mme. Bergeret, a very

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

substantial woman, cannot breathe in such a vacuum: she gasps and cries for mercy. Lucien is silently inexorable. Finally, when he introduces into the house a half-witted and drunken servant, who plays havoc with the china and flavours the meals with cinders, the erring wife decides to depart, and a new life begins for the professor. As usual with Anatole France, the conversations are the charm of the book. But the description of the realities of life in a household compelled to keep up a sort of shabby gentility is extraordinarily convincing; and it is given in a language of classical cadence and dignity, yet wherein the most common terms are used with perfect fitness.

The third book of the series, *The Amethyst Ring*, is first of all a bitter satire against the worldliness of the Established Church. Under the régime of the Concordat, bishops were appointed by the Government—that is to say, by the free-thinking ministers of an anticlerical republic. On the whole, these politicians have shown a creditable amount of sense and tact in their episcopal preferments, and the prelates of their choosing compared not unfavourably with those of previous régimes or of other countries.

ANATOLE FRANCE

But intrigues such as the one which secured the Bishopric of Tourcoing for Abbé Guitrel, Lantaigne's unworthy competitor, were not unthinkable. The de Bonmont, originally Gutenberg, are converted and naturalized Jews, Counts of the Pope, and whose sole desire is to break into the most exclusive aristocratic circles. Young de Bonmont wants to be invited to the Duke de Brécé's hunting parties, which would be the confirmation of his social claims. Guitrel, who has some influence with the old Catholic family, can help him. So the young clubman and the priest strike a bargain: Guitrel will further the worldly ambitions of de Bonmont, and de Bonmont the sacred ambitions of Guitrel. The devious ways through which the coveted purple cassock and ring of amethyst are secured cannot bear repeating: the fondness of Anatole France for licentious scenes, already noticeable in *The Rôtisserie*, assumes in this and all subsequent books the proportions of a disease. Suffice it to say that Madame de Gromance is instrumental in placing the mitre on Guitrel's head, and the crozier in his hand. After all, this is but the revival of an eighteenth-century tradition: gossip will have it that Madame de

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Pompadour offered Voltaire a cardinal's hat, if he would place his talent at the service of the Church. The irony of the tale is that Abbé Guitrel had given implicit promises that he would be a modern, liberal prelate, willing to live at peace with the Republic, its laws and its officials. Hardly was he seated on his episcopal throne—by the impure grace of Madame de Gromance—but he showed himself more uncompromising than Lantaigne would have been. And the old radical politician Loyer draws the moral of the story: Priests are bound to be our enemies: so, after all, it would be better policy to promote honest adversaries rather than smooth humbugs. I should not be surprised if the biting irony of *The Amethyst Ring* had had some influence in preparing public opinion for the separation of Church and State—one of the most beneficent measures of the present régime.

Our old friend Professor Bergeret takes a back seat, but is not quite forgotten in this book. The Dreyfus case, now at its height, and the welcome removal of Mme. Bergeret, are working a deep transformation in him. His mind is still many-sided and critical; but he no longer indulges in mere destructive paradoxes. He has

ANATOLE FRANCE

sharply defined opinions, and he is willing to defend them with quiet heroism. His conservative fellow-citizens do not make his life one of pleasantness and peace. But he goes on, undismayed. And, we are glad to say, his obscure efforts are rewarded: he is called to a professorship in Paris. Although a philosopher, Bergeret is a man. When still under the impression of his wife's treason, he had expounded to his new favourite pupil, M. Goubin, a most desperate conception of the world: life is but a disease, and we should hope that other planets have been spared that idle swarming of unclean and wicked microbes. A few months later, he indulged before the same confidant in beautiful dreams of universal life in distant stars. M. Goubin, of a literal turn of mind, ventured to call his master's attention to this apparent inconsistency: "A few months ago," replied M. Bergeret, "a few months ago, I had not been made a full professor in Paris."

But the most interesting character in *The Amethyst Ring* and in its sequel, *M. Bergeret in Paris*, is neither the scholar nor the priest: it is Riquet, a little yellow dog, whom Angelica, Bergeret's kindly old servant, has taken in, in

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

order to cheer and comfort her master in his loneliness. The growing friendship between Riquet and Bergeret, the beautiful, flowery disquisitions that the philosopher addresses to the puppy, the touches of quaint humour, the blend of realism and symbolism, are singularly hard to match in the extensive realm of dog literature. The great event that sealed their friendship was the tumbling down of Bergeret, who, tip-toe on a crazy stool, had tried to reach on the uppermost shelf a volume of Ottfried Müller's *Handbook*. "At the crash of the fall, Riquet had jumped down from his armchair, and run towards his unfortunate master. Close by him now, he kept moving about in anxious hesitation, he went forward, and then drew back. He would approach, urged by sympathy, and then flee, moved by the dread of a mysterious danger. He perceived clearly that a catastrophe had occurred: but his mind was not subtle enough to discover its causes: hence his restlessness. Finally, encouraged by the calm and silence which now prevailed again, with his two trembling forepaws he embraced the neck of M. Bergeret and gazed at him with eyes full of fear and love. And the fallen master smiled, and the

ANATOLE FRANCE

dog licked the end of his nose. This was a great comfort for M. Bergeret, who freed his right leg, stood up, and went back to his arm-chair, limping and smiling."

There are many fine passages in *M. Bergeret in Paris*—further memories of childhood in the best vein of *The Book of my Friend*, pastiches of the sixteenth century, records of Riquet's thoughts and deeds. But the tone of the book is more purely political than that of the first three, and less likely to appeal to a foreign public, or even to a later generation of Frenchmen. I might quote, however, as an instance of France's Voltairian irony, Bergeret's interview with M. Panneton de la Barge. The latter is a landed proprietor, conservative, patriotic, and a great admirer of the Army. He cannot conceal his righteous indignation with the Dreyfusists—among whom M. Bergeret has now taken a prominent position—because they place their idols, truth and justice, above the honour of the Army. Well, it is not without a purpose that M. Panneton de la Barge has sought out Bergeret, his political enemy. Young Hopeful Panneton de la Barge will soon be of military age: and the question is to send him to some school granting

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

a diploma that will excuse him from two out of three years of service.* For the *bourgeois* believed in an army for the people, just as they believed in a god for the people: they themselves would prefer to be heroic by their own firesides. Young Panneton is not gifted with the kind of intellect which makes a standard advanced degree fairly easy of access: so his father wants to know from Bergeret about the technical schools whose diplomas are accepted as equivalent for the regular academic titles, although considerably less difficult. The Graduate School of Commerce and the Agronomic Institute are suggested; and finally Bergeret mentions the School of Modern Oriental Languages. Young Panneton might learn Tamil or Hindustani. "There was," said Bergeret, "a language in India which was spoken by one old woman only, the last of her race; she died, but left a parrot; and from the bill of that parrot, a German scholar collected all that is left of that speech. It is now taught in the School of Modern Oriental Languages. Your son might study that." He probably did, and escaped two years of penal servitude: for in that light was barrack

* Under the military law of 1889.

ANATOLE FRANCE

life considered, in those days. I must add that conditions have greatly changed within the last fifteen years. The Army has become more of a reality, more at one with the nation: we may regret the remilitarization of the French national spirit; but the renationalization of the military spirit was a distinct advantage. With the deepening war-clouds looming on the horizon, shirkers of the Panneton type have become few and far between. And young Panneton, now some thirty years old, and an officer in the reserves, is daily offering his life for Justice and the Fatherland, reconciled at last.

§ 3. ANATOLE FRANCE AND SOCIALISM.

Towards a Better Age—On the White Stone.

In *M. Bergeret in Paris* is found a conversation between the Professor and the Carpenter, Roupart. This is a symbol of the union between intellectual workers and manual labourers in the name of justice—one of the finest results of the Dreyfus affair. Roupart is a Socialist. Bergeret is still but a sympathetic outsider. At least he was no more in the version published by the *Figaro*: socialism was ranked with early Chris-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

tianity as a noble dream. When the series appeared in book form, Bergeret—that is to say, Anatole France—had taken the decisive step. He no longer qualified his sympathy with Roupart. He was a socialistic catechumen: soon he would be a full-fledged Socialist. The doubter had seen the light; the dilettante accepted a set of trenchant affirmations; the man of taste and culture, fond of quiet luxury, turned his back on the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy,* and went about preaching the new gospel, in dingy suburban halls, reeking with gas, sweat, cheap tobacco and booze. This at fifty-seven, at the height of worldly success and without any personal ambition: one of the most interesting conversions, or perversions, in recent history. I do not want to minimize Zola's sincerity and his heroism: yet his plunge into active politics, on the democratic side, was by no means so surprising as that of Anatole France, nor so meritorious. Zola had ever been, in his faults as well as in his virtues, a man of the people; he had long announced his intention of going some day into politics, for

* Including the Academy, the last home of polite conversation, "*le dernier salon où l'on cause.*" Anatole France kept away from the Academy, in self-imposed ostracism, for several years.

ANATOLE FRANCE

which his combative temperament and his love of notoriety fitted him. The Dreyfus case gave him a splendid opening, and he found the Socialist army already drilled and eager to fight. The case was altogether different with Anatole France. He joined the organization and submitted to the discipline of the Socialist party as a private soldier. He could not be tempted to accept any position of authority: he declined the "safe" constituencies that were offered him. But he did not shirk humbler duties. He did yeoman's service, writing articles, manifestos, pamphlets, speaking in conventions and political meetings. And his socialism had the beautiful humanitarian tinge of the early days of '48. He was not harping all the time on the distress of his hearers, fanning diffidence, envy, hatred into revolt; he tried to rouse their sympathy in favour of distant victims—the Finns, the Poles, the Armenians. With Jaurès he strained every nerve against the revival of aggressive militarism of the last ten years, which has hurled Europe into hell; he denounced land-grabbing masquerading as peaceful penetration; he branded armour-plate patriotism and the international lobby of gun manufacturers—Krupp, Schneider, Vickers-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Maxim. He, the exquisite polisher of jewelled phrases, worked in favour of simpler forms of beauty, bathed in sympathy and pity, creating a closer harmony between the soul of a people and the small brotherhood of artists. Whoever reads the collection of his democratic speeches, *Towards a Better Age*,* cannot fail to be impressed with his activity and his sincerity.

Had he really caught a glimpse of the New Jerusalem? We turn with eager expectation to his Utopia, *On the White Stone*. The book is curiously constructed: two stories, one of the past, the other of the future, chased in a series of conversations dealing with contemporary events. The first, "Gallio," a tale of Roman Greece, is meant to illustrate the utter blindness of even the most liberal and cultured classes to movements that do not originate with them—and what movement could originate with them, who represent, by their very nature, self-satisfaction and conservatism? Gallio thinks of the squabbles among the Jews, which he is called upon to adjudge, in the same terms as a French administrator in Morocco would think of a dispute between two sets of Mohammedan fanatics.

* *Vers les Temps Meilleurs.*

ANATOLE FRANCE

Yet Gallio's world was doomed, and in Paul's were enclosed the germs of the future.* This puts us in the right mood for listening to the Utopia proper, *Through the Gate of Horn and the Gate of Ivory*. I have read as many Utopian romances as I could lay my hands on; it is a fascinating branch of literature. But I cannot think of any one quite so trite and so utterly disappointing as that of Anatole France. His new Jerusalem would make us regret the chaotic, cruel, sensual Babylon of to-day, which, with all its faults, has life in it, and love, and hope. The formulation of a desire enables us to anticipate its realization; but every wish that is fulfilled ceases to be a source of wonder and joy, whilst hope unsatisfied remains a constant cause of torment. An optimistic Utopia, a dream of a self-satisfied, static world, is bound to be dismal. The only Utopias of unflagging interest are those that are satirical or pessimistic, like Butler's *Erewhon*, Wells's *Time-Machine* and

* Anatole France had already treated a similar theme, and very successfully, in his tale: "The Procurator of Judæa." But the spirit was different. The earlier story is a veiled satire on Christianity; in the second, France's sympathy has veered from the cultured classes to the people.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

When the Sleeper Wakes, or Halévy's History of Four Years.

The hopeless mediocrity of France's Utopia is but the symbol of a more profound failure. Perhaps he was too old to embrace new ideas with unreasoning enthusiasm. And the times were not favourable. The magnificent spiritual storm of the Dreyfus case had left the atmosphere unpurified. The heterogeneous army of justice and truth had dissociated into its original elements: the *bourgeois* went back to the defence of their privileges, the people to their dreams of upheaval. The ideal of class reconciliation survived only as the policy of class compromise. I cannot condemn either party: there were honest men in both, and to call Millerand, Briand, Viviani, Clemenceau, apostates and turn-coats would be the rankest injustice. Did they sell the people's birthright for a mess of pottage? But pottage is good, the people were hungry, and the birthright, after all, was not sold outright. The political situation, after 1905, was more discouraging than ever before. Very few abuses had been corrected. Even the military courts which had twice condemned an innocent remained unreformed. The high road of which

ANATOLE FRANCE

we had caught a glimpse seemed to break up again into a maze of tortuous bypaths. Radical, anticlerical, anti-Cæsarian France was still committed to the old policies: distrust of democracy, protection of capital, territorial expansion. It was a period of hypocritical shilly-shallying. Drude, d'Amade, Lyautey, Gouraud, Mangin, were conquering Morocco, by the irrefutable right that machine-guns establish in an argument with flint-locks: but we unctuously called it "peaceful penetration."* Battleships were built: but they were baptized *Truth*, *Democracy*, *Justice*; and cruisers, but they received the names of *Jules Michelet* and *Ernest Renan*. No wonder that the flame of enthusiasm grew dim in the heart of Anatole France.†

But there was a deeper cause still for his discouragement—one found in his own heart. His destructive criticism had left no authority standing but that of human instincts. The

* "A distinction must be made," said the officially inspired *Temps*, "between the penetration itself, which is peaceful, and its instrument, which is military."

† It was at that time that he wrote his extensive and elaborate *Life of Joan of Arc*. A new cult for the Maid was a sign of the revival of nationalism; a few chance words of Prof. Thalamas had created a storm. Anatole France took his best Voltairian pen, and attempted to prove that,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

result could not be good, unless such instincts were good. A century after the Revolution, Anatole France knew only too well that the mob is full of ignorance and cowardly violence: Rousseauism pure and simple did not delude him. If only prejudices were swept away, if only Reason—that is to say, human nature in its full consciousness and freedom—could prevail; if the world were composed only of such citizens as Anatole France! Aye, what would the result be then? And France probes his own heart: he finds therein curiosity, sympathy, pity indeed, but also passionate desire, the desire for the good things of this world, the thirst for pleasure. If this world be the sole reality we are assured of, who can refute the preacher's advice: "Eat, drink, and be merry"? Be merry! Not at sixty, with the ice of age creeping up and benumbing your knees. The quest of pleasure!

after all, there was nothing so very wonderful in the career of a shepherdess reconquering France for her legitimate King. A thankless task, and a great waste of conscientious industry. Anatole France had many of the qualifications of the chronicler; he lacked the foremost virtue of the historian, which is sympathy. In style, his *Joan of Arc* is a painful compromise between Voltairian French and an archaic pastiche.

ANATOLE FRANCE

A tempting gospel indeed for the young in all their strength and beauty; in the hoary sinner, the ecstatic smile of Romeo becomes the leer of a satyr. There is nothing so distressing as the eroticism of an imagination which sullies that which it can no longer enjoy. Between pages of serene wisdom and generous pity, we find in all the later works of Anatole France growing evidences of a veritable disease. The promise of a new heaven and a new earth, held out by Socialism, was fading away in the poisonous mists of the political quagmire; the faith in the natural man must be wrecked in France's heart by the consciousness—the self-consciousness—that the natural man is a beast. And the result, in spite of success, genius, heartfelt sympathy, generous activity—the result is despair.

DISCOURAGEMENT AND CYNICISM.

*Penguin Island—The Gods are Athirst—The Revolt
of the Angels.*

The most typical products of this fourth period are *Penguin Island* and *The Gods are Athirst*. The latter is an historical novel of the French Revolution, wherein Anatole France

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

returns to his father's loathing for that cataclysm. Evariste Gamelin, the Terrorist, is one of those fools who believe in virtue. Such fanatics are harmless enough when, like Father de Longue-mare, they are too unworldly to act; practical energy makes them dangerous, for they wish to enforce virtue by law, and the law by the rule of the guillotine. Gamelin is a strange mixture of lust and Jacobin enthusiasm. Brotteaux des Islettes, the author's spokesman, is naught but a voluptuary, saved from degradation by a certain degree of easy kindness and elegant culture: a more fortunate Coignard, who has thrown off the theological mask. The atmosphere of the whole book is sickening with an odour of rottenness and blood. *Penguin Island*, in part a great book, is a symbolical history of France, in the framework of a Voltairian tale. St. Maël, sailing over strange seas, alone in his vessel of granite, descries an island whose inhabitants, clad of sober black and white, are standing in circles, visibly engaged in discussion. He blesses them and baptizes them. But the poor old saint was short-sighted, and it was penguins,* not men, that he has summoned to

* Strictly *auks*, according to Prof. J. S. Huxley.

ANATOLE FRANCE

eternal life. Will the gates of Paradise open to the Penguin folk? The discussion of this thorny question in heaven is irreverent but entertaining. Finally it is decreed that the Penguins baptized by St. Maël will be turned into men, and the rest of the book is an abstract of their chronicles. We pass in review the dark ages, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the classical period. A brief but pungent chapter is devoted to Trinco, or Napoleon. One-fourth of the whole volume treats of the Dreyfus case: no cheerful reading, for the author, in his disenchantment, pours the same heavy sarcasm on his own friends as on his adversaries. The seventh part is devoted to contemporary scandals of a private nature: it may be of some interest to the initiated who can place the real names under the pseudonyms Cérès and Visire: for the average public, it is dismal in its frigid salaciousness. The tone rises in the last part, which is sombre, but strange and beautiful: "Fifteen million men were working in the giant city." Penguin civilization has reached the utmost degree of material prosperity and corruption. It is radically destroyed by anarchists. Barbarism covers again the face of the earth,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

the very memory of Penguin Island is lost. Slowly, mankind emerges from brutishness, and resumes its weary crawling towards a goal which it can never attain. And the chapter closes, in bitter irony, with the description of a splendid, heartless civilization, rushing headlong to its ruin: "Fifteen million men were working in the giant city."

Meanwhile, Anatole France had kept his pot a-boiling with a slight novel, *Histoire Comique*, a tale of theatrical life in Paris, and, as may be surmised, not strictly edifying; with collections of short stories, *Bluebeard*, *The Tales of Jacquot Tournebroche*, *Crainquebille*, *Putois*, *Riquet*, etc. In *Crainquebille*, the sketch of an old Parisian street vendor and of his troubles with the police, Anatole France has scored a distinct success. Many of the other tales are surprisingly mediocre.* As for his last novel, *The Revolt of the Angels*, chaotic in construction, anarchistic in philosophy, it derived what measure of financial

* Just before the war, several daily papers in Paris were publishing, not one, but several short stories every day, some of them signed by the most illustrious names in French literature. The result of this excessive favour of the short story has been its irremediable vulgarization. A critic must now handle a ton of ore to extract an ounce of gold.

ANATOLE FRANCE

success it has achieved from its deliberate and painstaking licentiousness. A melancholy sunset for a great career !

§ 4. THE WAR. CONCLUSION.

On the Glorious Path.

At the outbreak of the war, Anatole France's attitude was, on the whole, intelligible and dignified. With the other Socialists, he wanted to avert the conflict. When the country was forced into the fray, he wanted to express his sympathy with her as one of the champions of democracy and justice. Like Victor Hugo in 1870, he solicited the privilege of wearing the uniform of a French soldier—a bit of sentiment and of symbolism at which no one, friend or foe, would dare to smile. At first at least, like Romain Rolland and Gustave Hervé, he attempted to remain potentially a good European, to look beyond the present strife, and, in days of blind hatred, to speak of future reconciliation. He has placed his pen at the service of his country, and has contributed articles, full of simple manliness, to the Bulletin that the Republic distributes to her soldiers. These and

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

other occasional pieces have been reprinted in his latest book, *Sur la Voie Glorieuse* (*On the Glorious Path*).^{*} May he live to see Europe born anew! May the doom of autocrats and the reconciliation of nations cheer his old heart, in which there ever were so much pity, so much love, such a burning desire for justice! May his soul be cleansed at last from carnal corruption, so that we may find again in him the tenderness and purity of Sylvestre Bonnard!

* Not "On the Path to Glory," as we have seen it translated. It is the path itself, the present effort, which is glorious; not the result, which might go to numbers rather than to heroism.

CHAPTER IV
PIERRE LOTI



CHAPTER IV.

PIERRE LOTI.

SIMPLE and strange and infinitely sad, the eternal pilgrim of the sea and of love: such is Pierre Loti, the most original, the most delicate, and yet the most popular of contemporary French novelists. No knowledge of French life and politics is needed in order to understand him, and he does not attempt to throw any light upon the menacing problems of the day. His roving life and his polychromous love affairs have not made him un-French: a great traveller, he can hardly be called a cosmopolitan. But, whether at home or abroad, he stands aloof from the artificial structure of civilization. He is as indifferent to constitutional forms and political questions in France as in Morocco, in Turkey as in India. Old Morocco was more appealing in its barbaric isolation than the Americanized, hustling mart of Casabianca—therefore all his sympathies go to old Morocco. In the very title of his book on India, he warns

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

us that the English element, materialistic, practical, political, unpicturesque, will be ignored: *L'Inde (sans les Anglais)*. Whether King, Emperor, President, Dictator or Demagogue be ruler in France, Loti would still be Loti: an artist, and above all a poet. Essentially lyrical, he has no claim to objectivity; and when accused of monotony, he pleads guilty, but not without pride. "Those writers," he says, "who are able at a certain moment to be different from themselves; those who can, for example, write a mystic play after an atheistic poem, have no soul, are naught but hired amusers. The true poets, in the freest, widest sense of the term, are those who were born with but two or three songs that they needs must sing at any cost, and which are always the same. What matters it, after all, if they sing them every time with their whole heart?" Loti is not a realist and not an idealist; not a democrat and not a conservative; he has no cause to defend, no thesis to prove: "Without ever coming to a conclusion, he has done nothing but sing his awe-struck admiration before the changing immensity of the world, and utter his cry of revolt and despair before death." He is a poet pure and simple—a sensitive child,

PIERRE LOTI

amused for a moment by the multifarious splendour of the visible universe; a wanderer ever attempting to find himself and to flee from himself; a mystic without a faith, who can but dream, yearn, and despair.

§ 1. EDUCATION.

Feminine influences—Protestantism—The sea.

Julien Viaud was born at Rochefort in 1850. Like Anatole France, he has given us a record of his childhood. His *Romance of a Child* has no spark of the wit and humour so abundant in *The Book of my Friend*. But it is exquisitely delicate and tender. The quays of Paris, the very core of French culture, were the first and best teachers of young Anatole Thibault.* No such favour fell to the lot of Julien Viaud. Aunis and Saintonge are, I believe, the most desperately flat provinces in the whole of France; and Rochefort, his native city, is a most artificial creation of the seventeenth century, built on the chessboard plan so dear to the American mind. Strange to say, the world-traveller, whose eyes have feasted on the choicest bits of

* Anatole France.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

scenery that this globe affords, has remained passionately attached to the humble, uninteresting place of his birth. For us whose lot it is to live in a country flatter than Saintonge and in a city more symmetrical than Rochefort, Loti's example should be a source of unspeakable comfort. It proves that the strangest flower of poetry can thrive even in the most unpicturesque surroundings.

Loti's family was of old Huguenot stock. Protestantism is still firmly rooted in those parts, which, after the death of Henry IV., formed the dream of becoming an independent republic—the Netherlands of France. La Rochelle, their heroic capital, is but a few miles to the north. Some of Loti's ancestors fled to Holland at the time of the great persecution. Others remained in the dismal, low-lying island of Oleron, where the memory of their long sojourn was still preserved in Loti's childhood. Pierre Loti is one of the very few Protestant writers in modern French literature; and, on the surface, the least Protestant of all. Yet the evening prayer of the whole household, the big family Bible, left upon his soul an imprint that naught could efface. In the religion of his parents, there

PIERRE LOTI

were none of those superficial graces which attracted for a moment the precocious dilettante in Anatole France, and left him bereft of genuine spirituality. When young Loti wanted to become a minister and then a missionary, it was not, like young France, in order to print an honourable title ("Martyr and Saint of the Calendar") on his visiting cards. To a depth beyond the reach of theologies, Pierre Loti has remained a Christian. But French Protestantism, through no fault of its own, is no longer a vital force in national life. It is an interesting survival rather than a germ of the future. The victim of a tragic but irremediable injustice, it cannot help arguing over and over again a case that was settled by force two hundred years ago. Hence an excessive sentiment of tradition; a tendency to self-righteousness — and from self-righteousness to pharisaism the transition is almost imperceptible; the despondency of a lost cause deepening the gloom of a pessimistic theology; a certain coldness and artificiality in its forms of worship. All this repelled the soul of Loti, ardent and eager for love. The religious jargon known among Huguenots as "the patois of Chanaan" sickened him. No

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

living writer has proclaimed so early and so uncompromisingly his estrangement from the faith of his race; and logically enough, he came to the conclusion that

“It were better done, as others use
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra’s hair.”

But earthly love could not fill the yearning of his heart, and an aching void marked for ever the place of the unforgotten hope.

Of his father, Loti has very little to say; his brother was much older than himself and seemed to belong to a different generation. So the little boy was brought up in the large, austere family home, carefully tended, and spoilt within reason, by his mother, his sister, and his aunts. To these feminine influences are due many of the traits of his character: his sensitiveness, his depths of pity, his longing for love, the deep-rooted purity and delicacy which enabled him to write the best pages of his *Iceland Fisherman*, and which he preserved even in his wildest adventures. Perhaps also his fondness for animals: like all true poets, and like most old maids, Loti is a lover of cats, and does not much appreciate the boisterous and vulgar companionship of dogs.

PIERRE LOTI

I am afraid that our Rough-Rider might find in his rich vocabulary a few unpleasant epithets for Pierre Loti; and I was told that the fastidiousness of his appearance and the uncanny gloss of his moustache had created an unfavourable impression in New York, when he came over to superintend the staging of his Chinese play, *The Daughter of Heaven*. Needless to say that the words *effeminacy* and *cissiness* would be ridiculously wide of the mark. Yet there is that in Loti which might easily be misinterpreted by men made of sterner or coarser stuff.

These qualities and these faults were not corrected by his school education: he received his early training from private tutors, of whom he has left us rather savage caricatures. When he attended the Lycée, it was as a day pupil; he was spared intimate and constant contact with rough boys of his own age—an experience sometimes wholesome, but as often degrading. Like Anatole France, he was a fairly good student in his own amateurish way, and did not shine in literary composition. Theirs were exceptional cases, in apparent support of the fallacy that budding geniuses are never appreciated by their

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

schoolmasters—a fallacy as baseless as the alleged knavery of ministers' sons. Most of our great writers made brilliant records at school. The loose composition which may add an undefinable charm to the mature books of France and Loti was a positive fault in the essays of young collegians devoid as yet of genuine originality. Of Loti's failure to get good marks I should say what a temperance advocate said of the miracle at Cana: "Ce n'est pas ce qu'il a fait de mieux."

Loti's first vocation was the ministry, soon changed to foreign missions. The call of the vast world without was already heard. Rochefort, although an inland city, lies on a navigable stream, and possesses an arsenal accessible to the smaller war vessels. Loti discovered with delight old log-books in his father's library; most of his neighbours had friends and relatives in that vague Utopia called "the Colonies." Did not an old Senegalese woman at Gorée later claim a shadowy cousinship with him? His brother had already embraced the seafaring life. When the boy saw the sea for the first time, his heart recognized her. So the sensitive and pensive child, nervous, passionately fond

PIERRE LOTI

of music—"mother's pet"—decided to become, and became, indeed, a naval officer—than which there is no rougher and manlier career. And he acquitted himself like a man. Captain Julien Viaud could hardly be expected to become one of the great leaders of the French Navy: he has devoted too much of his time to literature for that. But his professional record, although not dazzling, is creditable. When he might have retired to enjoy his fame, Loti faced unflinchingly, for many a long year, the lurking dangers and the constant drudgery of his calling. We may add that he was served by a healthy and well-trained body: that a poetic soul should find its habitat in a wasted frame is another exploded fallacy. Although slight of build, Loti is an athlete, and almost an acrobat. A strange contrast, in appearance, that a tender and melancholy dreamer should prove a success in such a stern profession—just as strange as the contrast between his mystic yearnings and his nihilistic intellect, between the ineffaceable puritanism of his soul and the reckless epicureanism of his early life! Are such contrasts so rare? It seems to be a universally accepted fact that the grimmest sea-dogs may have in their hearts

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

treasures of shy and naïve tenderness. Only there is not a sea-dog in a million that can write and dares to write like Loti.

§ 2. LOTI'S NOVELS: 1879-1892.

Exotic idylls—*My Brother Yves*—*The Iceland Fisherman*—*Madame Chrysanthemum*.

Young Loti seems to have availed himself to the full of the sailor's privilege: he had a wife in every port, from Papeete to Dakar and Oran, from Nagasaki to Cattaro and Constantinople: a rainbow of strange heroines, Rarahu, Azyadé, Suleima, Fatou-Gaye,* Pascuala Ivanowitch, Madame Chrysanthemum. The framework of several of his early tales is the same; the young officer lands, buys a local costume, learns a few words of the language, and then sallies forth in quest of "das ewig Weibliche." The man-of-war's station comes to an end. The bride of a few days weeps, and, if she be a proper heroine, dies. The officer is sorry, very sorry indeed. Not so much for her as for himself—for is he not

* The *Spahi's Romance*, in which Fatou-Gaye appears, does not claim to be autobiographical. One must draw the line somewhere.

PIERRE LOTI

a poet—that is to say, the quintessence of selfishness?—and he finds in this very remorse and in his self-pity a delicious torment of which he gives his readers the benefit. He may be faithful to the extent of revisiting, ten or fifteen years later, the scene of his early love; and we have a book like *An Oriental Phantom*, which is the attenuated shadow of a previous success.* Once, however, the naval Don Juan finds a heart steeled against him, and he must leave with the disappointment of cherishing no remorse. Mme. Chrysanthemum becomes his lawful bride for a season, after a manner they have in quaint old Japan, and also, I am told, somewhere east of 'Frisco and west of Cape Cod; and when the hour of separation comes, she gives him her prettiest smile, she drops him her deepest curtsy—and carefully proceeds to count her money. Mme. Chrysanthemum is no Mme. Butterfly. This hurts Loti to the quick. She was not playing the game—at least, not his game; and in his three books on Japan, we can feel a current of antipathy. Had Mme. Chrysanthemum realized the literary greatness of her European husband, and how his words of praise or

* *Azyadé*.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

blame would go round the world, she might have been patriotic enough to commit hara-kiri, not for Loti's sake, but for the good name of the Island Empire. There is no kind of literature that is quite so sickening as love stories told in the first person by the surviving hero. *Lamar-tine* was guilty of such lack of tact in *Graziella*, and we find it hard to forgive him. It cannot be denied that two or three of Loti's masterpieces have that unpleasant element in them. Yet it must be said that the objection appears in all its strength only when we give a heartless, colourless summary of the theme. When we read the text itself, we do not criticize. The books are rambling, without definite plot, a medley of pictures of exotic life, descriptions of nature, love scenes, lyrical notes: but they are so young, so spontaneous, so artless, so deeply tender withal, that we forget and forgive all literary and moral blemishes: we no longer see the dunghill of selfishness in which those mystic flowers are rooted.

Moreover, it would be singularly unjust to consider these exotic idylls as giving the full measure of Loti's genius. Quite as unique in contemporary literature, quite as typical of his

PIERRE LOTI

art, are his novels of the sailor's life: *Mon Frère Yves* (*My Brother Yves*, 1883), *Pêcheur d'Islande* (*The Iceland Fisherman*, 1886), *Matelot* (*A Common Sailor*, 1893). The first is the plain, artless story of a Breton sailor, Yves, the gentlest of men, the most obedient of the whole crew, as well as one of the bravest and most resourceful, as long as he is sober. But he has sudden outbreaks of wild indiscipline, followed by periods of sullen despair, and, wherever he lands, he falls an easy prey to the lure of the longshore saloon. Loti became attached to the man, and saved him from many a bad scrape. He humanized, as much as in him lay, the rigid discipline of the navy. Without any loss of dignity and authority, he realized with Yves that ideal relationship which ought to prevail between servants of the same cause and of the same flag, and which is expressed by the word "brotherhood." Yves's parents entreat him to aid and protect their boy, chiefly against himself; and he promises to be a "brother" to him. There is no plot in the book: when we read such a perfectly simple and convincing story, the very idea of a plot seems artificial and incongruous. We see Yves and his comrades on the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

seven seas, in the daily routine of their rough and healthy life, in their hours of peril, in their hours of leisure—big children all, coarse and innocent, whiling time away with their pets and their songs, gazing at sea or sky, their hearts full of vague homesickness, their primitive souls full of inarticulate dreams. We see them on shore, wasting in one riotous night the savings of several months' hard toil. We see Yves and his "brother" in Brittany, that strangely captivating land, where types, costumes, faith and language have hardly changed for centuries. We see the humble, chaste courtship of Yves, his brief period of happiness, in his little house of rough granite, with the double-decked bed of carved oak that closes like a wardrobe. We see—for Loti is not unduly optimistic, and is not afraid of sombre scenes which equal in energy the strongest in Zola—we see Brest, the great arsenal, with its sordid temptations, its squalor, its vice. And although we leave Brother Yves happy with his young family, a poignant melancholy tinges the closing scenes: we feel that the demon is not yet exorcized, that Yves's modest comfort and peace are fragile, as fragile as his resolutions. There are few indictments of alco-

PIERRE LOTI

holism stronger than this plain record, so convincing is its simplicity. And the readers who may have been disgusted with the juvenile love stories of Loti will find in *My Brother Yves* a man's man, whom they can unreservedly admire.

The Iceland Fisherman is written in the same vein. It is also a tale of the seafaring population of Brittany. It is so full of intimate knowledge and profound sympathy that the author has often been thought to be a Breton. Is he not the younger brother of the great Breton Chateaubriand? Yet he never lived in Brittany until he was thirty years old; and whilst the old Celtic province is the bulwark of Catholicism, Loti is a Huguenot who has become an agnostic. By some phenomenon which only reincarnation would seem to explain, Loti had the impression of returning home, when he went to Brittany. But that same sentiment of home-coming also fills his heart wherever Islam extends its sombre peace. A poet's soul is richer than the world.

The Iceland Fisherman is one of the most popular books in modern fiction. Of the French edition, 300,000 copies were sold, and there is hardly any language into which it has not been translated. It is a book which appeals to all

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

classes of readers: perfectly simple in plot, incident, sentiment and style, it is full of the subtlest charm. The subject is the sweet and tragic idyll between Yann Gaos and Gaud Mevel. Yann loves Gaud. But timid and proud, self-willed and capricious, he cannot be brought to confess his love, because everybody wants him to marry Gaud, and because she is too fine, too much of a "demoiselle," for a plain fisherman. It is not until misfortune befalls her that the big stubborn child comes round at last. They are married, and the man who has sung *Azyadé* and *Rarahu* finds accents of infinite tenderness and purity to describe the happiness of Gaud and Yann. Their idyll lasts six days. Yann goes back to his calling. Gaud waits for him for many months, with slowly sinking heart. All the boats return from Iceland, even one that was long overdue. But Yann never comes back.

All Brittany lies before our eyes, with its rugged coast bathed in mist, and ever assailed by the furious waves of the Atlantic; with its granite rocks strewn with heather, gorse, and broom; with its thatched huts clustering round a tall spire; with the quaint garb of its peasant folk, and their deep, melancholy, slow-moving

PIERRE LOTI

soul. And we catch glimpses of the strange polar seas, phantasmal under the midnight sun. We have moments of merry-making among the simple-hearted fishermen. We have scenes of deep mourning, as when poor Grandmother Moan is notified, with heartless formality, that her little Sylvestre has died in the Chinese Sea. Gaud, Yann, and their companions are simple enough, and free from the subtleties and perversities of Bourget's heroes: yet they live, more convincingly than the morbid creations of professional psychologists. But the chief character in the drama, the Chorus, one and multitudinous, which gives it its tone of tragic mystery, is the sea, the boundless, the fascinating, the devouring. Like a *leit-motiv* in a haunting, heartrending, minor key, recur the half-jesting, half-prophetic allusions of Yann to his engagement with the sea. And the monstrous bride claims him at last.

All the books of Loti are in a sense leaves from his diary; and his personality is too self-centred to change in a trice. Yet we should not take too literally his proud confession of monotony. As a matter of fact, two books by the same writer could hardly be more different in setting

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

and in spirit than the *Iceland Fisherman* and his next novel, *Mme. Chrysanthemum*, which appeared in 1888. On the one hand, Brittany, primitive and sombre; on the other, refined and smiling Japan; in the West, an idyll of unequalled purity and depth; in the East, the commonplace adventure of a European officer in a treaty port; in the first book, a spirit of sympathy, an atmosphere of tragic mystery, the rugged grandeur of Brittany and Iceland, the unfathomable waves of the sea and of love; in *Mme. Chrysanthemum*, a confession of misunderstanding, a spirit of hostility and contempt veiled under the forms of humorous urbanity. The Japan he depicts is pretty, on a small scale and in a petty manner; exquisite, but heartless; refined, but trifling; polite, but with strange reserves of obscenity, treachery, and hatred. This hostility of Loti against Japan has a double root: first, as we said before, *Mme. Chrysanthemum* did not commit hara-kiri, and thus deprived the vast circles of Loti's readers of a most affecting scene. Then Loti hates our modern civilization; he loves those countries which have remained untainted by its blight, and which, like Islam, spurn it. Japan, on the contrary, was then the

PIERRE LOTI

latest and most enthusiastic convert to Western progress—a traitor to the cause which Loti holds sacred. When, in his book *Japan in Autumn*, he describes the temples of old Japan, lost in dense forests, he resumes his usual tone of sympathy. *Mme. Chrysanthemum*, as a novel, is as trifling as gossamer. It can hardly be called a great book; but like the paintings of the Japanese themselves, it has wonderful atmosphere. It came at the right time too—when there was in Paris a recrudescence of the Japanese craze inaugurated by the Goncourt brothers. It remains one of the most popular among the works of Loti. In 1905 he published a sequel to it, *The Third Youth of Mme. Plum*, which is even less of a novel, and much more of a satire. His aversion has increased with the modernization of Japan, and the Russo-Japanese conflict, predicted by the author five years before, gave a tragic background to his mincing and smirking puppets.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

§ 3. LOTI'S NOVELS: AFTER 1892.

A Sailor—Ramuntcho—The Disenchanted—Miscellaneous works.

In 1892, at the comparatively early age of forty-two, Pierre Loti became immortal, which, being interpreted, means that he was elected to the French Academy. His next novel, *A Common Sailor*, tells us the simple story of a sailor boy and his fond mother, with the usual tragic ending. The boy, a Southerner, handsome, loving, with a poet's soul, is incurably addicted to dreaming, and has not the strength of will to discipline his intellect. He fails in his examination for the Naval Academy, and enlists as a common sailor; he feels that his superficial learning is drifting farther and farther away from him. Meanwhile, his mother has to give up her last pretensions to middle-class respectability, and becomes an ordinary working woman. He is stricken with fever in Indo-China, and dies on his way home. His mother's despair, and the comfort she finds in a religion from which the author himself is estranged, are among the most pathetic passages in modern literature. *A Common Sailor* has been overshadowed by the

PIERRE LOTI

more unique *Iceland Fisherman*: but few novels attain the same power, with such simple means.

In *Ramuntcho*, we are again in France, but in one of its outlying and most un-French provinces, the Basque country—a strange little nation, astride on the Pyrenees, speaking a primitive language unrelated with any other. The book, which appeared in 1896, was the outcome of a long period of service on the Bidassoa, a small river which marks the boundary between France and Spain. It is perhaps Loti's nearest approach to a novel of the conventional type. The plot is simple, but definite and continuous. The author's personality never obtrudes itself. Ramuntcho, the son of a Basque woman and of a Parisian father, and a very young girl, Gracieuse, love each other—as pure and pretty an idyll as can be found anywhere, simple and sweet without becoming sentimental. But Gracieuse's mother, a proud and domineering woman, hates Ramuntcho's mother, and opposes the marriage. The lovers think of emigrating to South America, the Eldorado of the Basques. But too great is their love for their people and their native country. Ramuntcho has to serve his time in the French Army: when he returns,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

he finds Gracieuse a nun. Her brother offers to help him carry her away: but a visit to the convent reveals the impracticability of the scheme: Gracieuse belongs to God and has found peace. Their last conversation is friendly, even confidential, outwardly commonplace, with hidden depths of sorrow. Ramuntcho leaves the Basque country for ever. Here again the Huguenot, the agnostic, the epicure, has found convincing accents to describe the mystery of faith, and the peace that passeth all understanding. No priest could improve on the description of the humble convent in which Ramuntcho finds his former fiancée. Although Loti, in this as in all his other books, is a master of description, the characters and the story are fully as important as the picturesque setting. We have long chapters devoted to the two principal forms of activity of the most robust and agile among that strong and nimble race: smuggling and the game of pelota.* But these

* The Basque pelota is played against a wall or fronton, by means of a long scoop fastened to the wrist; it seems to mean as much to the people in France, Spain, and South America, as football or baseball to our average undergraduate. Even in Paris, the game was popular, at least for a season.

PIERRE LOTI

episodes are cunningly interwoven with the story.

Loti's last novel, *The Disenchanted* (1908) is the only one of his works of fiction that is meant to serve a cause: it is a plea in favour of the educated women of modern Turkey. The title is ambiguous on purpose. The "Disenchanted" are those fairy princesses of the East, who for centuries have slept their happy sleep, and have now been wakened by the wand of Western civilization. But, waking, they find their free souls still trammelled by the prejudices of immutable Islam. More cultured than their brothers, good linguists, musical, great readers during their innumerable hours of enforced idleness, they are debarred from any intelligent activity in the outside world, and are still, in the eyes of the law, but a higher order of chattel. So modern life, thus incomplete, has proved a disenchantment indeed; and if they cannot receive the full freedom of their Western sisters, they would rather go back to the slumberous peace of the old harem. Now, it is easy to conceive how any other first-class writer—Bourget, for instance—with such a thesis to prove, would have gone about; how he would have marshalled

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

his arguments in syllogistic array, and contrived an affabulation that would have made his conclusion dramatic and inevitable. Not so Loti. We find in *The Disenchanted* the triumph of his masterly artlessness. Never for a moment does the book give the irksome impression of being a treatise in the garb of fiction; it is human, that is all. It gives us days and years from lives essentially foreign, and yet so essentially the same as ours! The same yearning, the same revolt, although the obstacles be different. Three Turkish ladies write to André Lhéry—evidently Loti himself—asking him to plead their cause. He meets them repeatedly, not without some personal risk, and never for any purpose but to learn from them, and to assure them of his sympathy. All three, after sad experiences in their married lives, die young. Through the book runs an almost intangible thread of love. André Lhéry, who is no longer young, has too much respect for love, for his own past, for himself, to become that most despicable of all beings, a grey-haired Lothario. His heart and his imagination may have remained ardent: but he checks whatever sentimental interest he might be tempted to take in his Turkish friends:

PIERRE LOTI

he will be naught but their adviser and spokesman. Djenane, the chief of the three, will not allow her desperate effort on behalf of her sex to degenerate into an international flirtation. It is but at the hour of death, with André two thousand miles away, that she confesses her love. It is said that in the apse of Saint Sophia the image of the Wisdom of God, covered with repeated coats of Mohammedan whitewash, still stares at the people with her faint, haunting, inextinguishable eyes: so love appears in this book, sad unto death but deathless, all the more potent through its triple veil. The background of the story is Constantinople, and particularly Stamboul, the purely Turkish part of that great cosmopolitan agglomeration, with which *Azyadé* had made us familiar; and never, since the magic evocation of medieval Paris in Hugo's *Notre-Dame*, had any city stood before our eyes with such intensity of life.

We have completed the review of the ten or twelve volumes which can be called novels or romances. They by no means exhaust the literary production of Pierre Loti. He gave us a number of purely descriptive books—*Morocco*, *Towards Ispahan*, *The Last Days of*

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Pekin, The Death of Philæ—all expressing his love for ancient forms of civilization, his loathing of the rising tide of Western commercialism. Other books may be termed "A Pilgrim's Diary": thus the triptych on the Holy Land: *The Desert, Galilee, Jerusalem*; thus *India (without the English)*; thus *A Pilgrimage to Angkor*. The wandering, homesick soul goes in quest of faith to those places which have been hallowed by the sacred traditions of centuries: everywhere he is moved, and everywhere disappointed. No illumination comes to him from the empty tombs. Then he published collections of sketches, souvenirs and essays, minor works perhaps, but delightfully varied and intimate, and whose very titles are full of romantic charm: *The Book of Pity and Death, Gleams on the Sombre Road, Faces and Things that were Passing, The Castle of the Sleeping Beauty*. He has even turned his hand to the drama, the very last craft in which a lyric poet and a word-painter would be expected to excel; he has given us stage versions of Rarahu and Ramuntcho, a translation of *King Lear*, an original play about his own ancestors at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (*Judith Renaudin*), and even a Chinese

PIERRE LOTI

tragedy, *The Daughter of Heaven*. He has left the poet's ivory tower in order to relieve distress, and his appeals on behalf of Breton fishermen have brought a generous response. Perhaps it is in his pro-Turkish campaigns that we see him at his best. He took the defence, alone in the French Press, of his Turkish friends, so cynically attacked by Austria, Italy, and their Balkan neighbours at the very moment when they were attempting to reform their crumbling empire. Loti was undoubtedly a partisan, and his documents are scarcely more reliable than those of his opponents. But, even if mistaken, his loyalty in the hour of need was chivalrous, and his denunciation of all wars of aggression and conquest will find an echo in the hearts of those who love humanity. His book *The Death-Throes of Turkey* is but a journalistic medley, meant to serve temporary ends, but it contains pages which ought to live. At the beginning of the Great War, he volunteered as a reserve officer, and resumed his former rank in the French Navy. He was given shore duties, not so exacting that they would interfere with his contributions to the Press; the numerous

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

articles that have been so widely circulated in the English and American papers are evidences of undiminished powers.

§ 4. THE ART AND THOUGHT OF PIERRE LOTI.

A lyrical painter—"Anguish" the key-note—Nature and love as refuge—"The Books of Pity and Death"—"Supreme Pity."

We may now attempt to characterize the different elements of his art and of his thought, so elusive under their apparent simplicity. The casual reader thinks of Loti, first of all, as a descriptive writer, a painter in words. He belongs to the line of those men for whom, in Gautier's terms, "the outer world exists": Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier. He has seen more varied landscapes and seascapes than any of them; he is more reliable than Chateaubriand, who could not draw the line between fact and fiction, and actually saw, with those romantic eyes of his, "monkeys hanging by their tails over the cataract of Niagara, fishing up, as they dashed by, the shattered corpses of elks and bears." But it would be a mistake to bracket Loti with a mere

PIERRE LOTI

word-painter like Gautier. Gautier was a pagan, with hardly any sentiment in his heart, and very few ideas in his head. Marvellously accurate, he gave us splendid inventories, so complete that, with a certain amount of sympathetic insight, we can imagine the soul of the places he describes. With Loti, the soul is felt first: then the material details take unobtrusively their place in the total picture. We see the forest before the trees; we feel its gloom and peacefulness before we see its mingled light and shade. A logician like Taine, by sheer strength of will, could give us descriptions that rival Gautier's in brilliancy. But he could not, with his intellectual machine, powerful and delicate though it be, render spiritual atmosphere with Loti's easy mastery. A selection from the works of Loti would indeed be an incomparable album: but it would be an album of songs rather than of photographs. His descriptions are lyrical; they are the notation of a state of mind blending with or reacting against certain physical surroundings.

That state of mind is constant with Loti, in spite of fleeting moods: it is the mixture of curiosity, pity, and dread which is denoted by his

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

favourite word, "anguish." Born with a pilgrim soul, estranged from the faith which alone gives peace, he attempts to satisfy with finite pleasures his infinite longings, and knows beforehand that all is vanity. He has roamed through the world, but its beauty is a vain show, the gorgeous raiment of his own melancholy. Anguish everywhere! In strange civilizations he finds a torturing delight, for they are dying, and he sees the tide of European vulgarity already assailing and submerging them all. The pageant of nature and civilization cannot make him forget his dread—the futility of life, the flight of time, the uncharted darkness beyond. He tries love as a supreme opiate: there again he fails. The twin curses of man's destiny are still upon him: isolation and transitoriness. No one can reach beyond the prison bars of his own personality, and every idyll must end when the ship's bell is rung and the eternal wanderer puts again to sea.

It may be argued that if Loti had indeed been athirst for deep and permanent soul-communion, he might have selected more eligible mates than Azyadé, Rarahu, or Chrysanthemum. His love affairs are too superficial and too exceptional to

PIERRE LOTI

be of universal significance : it is not every man's privilege to be the Romeo of such an ethnographic museum as we find in Loti's books. True enough. Yet those strange exotic idylls move us deeply ; there is nothing frivolous about them : they are profoundly human. In them, all conventionalities, including the most sacred of all, intellectual culture and traditional morality, have to be left in abeyance : the lovers have not one idea in common and can barely stammer the simplest words of each other's language. But their love is not bestial, not even purely sensual : compared with the subtle perversities of France and Bourget, it is deep and chaste. It is rooted in needs and passions which go beyond culture and ethics : it is primitive, essential. Loti, himself the product of an old civilization, can throw off the burden of centuries, and return for a while to the days when this earth was young. He gives us at times a strange impression, as though the painted world which has become so real to us were rolled up like a scroll, revealing Eden.

Then, although the obstacles between Loti and his friends are of an exceptional nature, they are but the rare, poetic symbols of obstacles

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

found every day in our commonplace lives. Rarahu, Azyadé, cannot speak his language: but were there ever, even in Paradise, two lovers who fully understood each other? Have not the most hackneyed words a personal connotation which is incommunicable? I put my thoughts into words that betray them, and which, in your turn, you are bound to misunderstand. Loti wonders what thoughts may be going on under the smooth brow of his Tahitian, or of his Turkish, brides: are there not moments when our dearest friend is a sphinx? And the ship which stays but a season, the remorseless ship which leaves far behind the enchanted island wherein we loved—has not that ship called us away from home, mother, and former friends, will it not carry us at last beyond the bourne of time and space? Like the Iceland Fishermen, are we not encompassed by a treacherous devouring sea, which snatches from us now this friend, now that other, until it drags us at last into its unknown depths?

All the works of Loti could be called *The Book of Pity and Death*. And as age creeps on, as the delusion of love vanishes, his anguish becomes more desperate, and his pity more tender. Like

PIERRE LOTI

Alfred de Vigny, he loves "that which passes and is never seen a second time." "To end," he cries, "to end, when one feels that nothing within you has changed, that the same impulse would still urge you on towards adventure, towards the unknown, if there were any left in this world ! To have been a child before whom the world was to unfold itself—to have been one who was to live—and to be one that has lived !"

The traveller is weary, and his quest has been vain. Vain ? Has he not risen from pleasure to pity, and from that pity which is but a form of selfishness to the most tender sense of human brotherhood ? Has he fallen so far short of his reward ? Pascal heard Jesus say to him : "Thou wouldst not thus search for Me, if thou hadst not already found Me in thy heart." Loti has not found the God of theologians, but he has caught a distant vision of the God of Love.

"And yet," he says in the closing pages of his *Pilgrimage to Angkor*, "from this life of mine, so brief, and scattered over the whole earth, I shall have gained something, a lesson which is not sufficient yet, but which heralds the dawn of serenity. . . . So many places of frantic adoration have I come across on my way, each corre-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

sponding to some particular form of human anguish—so many pagodas, mosques, and cathedrals, whence the same prayer rises from the depths of the most different souls ! . . . Such a mass of supplications, such burning tears, imply the almost universal confidence that God can be naught but the God of pity. As pity for one another, the fraternal pity preached by Buddha and Jesus, won its way into our souls, repressing our natural ferocity, the notion was strengthened within us that there must be somewhere a Supreme Pity to hear our cries, and our sanctuaries became more and more places for supplications and tears. . . . This Sovereign Pity, I incline more and more to believe in it, to stretch my arms towards it, because I have suffered too much, under all skies, in the midst of delights and in the midst of horror, because I have seen too much suffering, too many tears, heard too many prayers. . . . That Supreme Pity towards whom we stretch our hands in our despair, it must exist, whatever name it bears; it must be there, able to hear, at the moment of the separation of death, our cry of infinite distress—else Creation, which can no longer reasonably be excused on the plea of unconscious-

PIERRE LOTI

ness, would be a deed of inadmissible cruelty, because it would be too odious and too cowardly.

“And from all my numberless pilgrimages, futile or grave, this weak, old-fashioned argument is after all the one thing worth while that I have brought back.” *Amen.*

CHAPTER V
PAUL BOURGET

CHAPTER V.

PAUL BOURGET.

“ WELL-WRITTEN works alone,” said old Buffon, “ will be handed down to posterity.” If any of the books of Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès are still read half a century after their author’s death, it will be on the strength of their purely literary merits. These we have no desire to belittle: Paul Bourget and Maurice Barrès are both consummate artists. Barrès does not fall far short of Pierre Loti himself as a master of lyrical description, and his style, less smooth and less perfect than that of Anatole France, has at times a more subtle music, and more sudden power. Paul Bourget conquered a distinguished rank among minor poets before he made his mark in prose; he too can be a word-painter of no little penetration and charm; and his prose, often pedantic, has classical qualities of coherence and vigour. Of all living writers of fiction, he is probably the most skilful technician; the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

structure of his best novels is wellnigh faultless; and his worst enemies recognize that his psychology, albeit ponderous, obtrusive, and over-systematic, is careful, subtle, often convincing, not seldom profound. Yet of both these writers we may affirm that the prestige, the influence they now enjoy in certain circles are quite out of proportion with their literary deserts. Both claim to be leaders of thought—almost party leaders. They are the champions of the doctrine of tradition. In Barrès, an active politician, that doctrine assumes the form of "Nationalism." Bourget, a psychologist who became a moralist, is the defender of the Catholic point of view: the spicy author of *Physiologie de l'Amour Moderne* is now the last of the Fathers, a Cardinal in green.* It is with the thesis of these men, rather than with their fiction, that we are concerned. Their evolution is a chapter

* Cardinals in green: the uniform of French Academicians is heavily embroidered with green palms. The expression was coined at the time of the separation of Church and State; it was then used exclusively to denote those Catholic members of the Academy who respectfully advised the Pope to accept a *modus vivendi* with the French Government.

PAUL BOURGET

in the agelong conflict between the ideals of the Ancient Régime and those of the Revolution in the soul of contemporary France.

§ 1. RATIONALISM AND TRADITION.

Rationalism triumphant before the Revolution; on the defensive thereafter—Taine's influence on Bourget and Barrès.

From the seventeenth century—at least—to the very end of the eighteenth, *Reason* was the chief ideal of the French mind. Descartes and Boileau are typical rationalists in philosophy and in literature. Under Louis XIV., that ideal of reason seemed to blend admirably with authority and tradition: all three combined to uphold things as they were. The literature of antiquity was worshipped: not blindly and because it was ancient, but as the embodiment of reasonableness, as reason itself compared with the childishness of the Middle Ages or the extravagance of Italy and Spain. The Bourbon monarchy was accepted—strange as it may seem to us—as a reasonable ideal; its divine origin, its immemorial tradition, enhanced its prestige: yet the very foundations of its power were found

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

in its comparative efficiency, its national character, the glory and splendour it gave France; on these broad and seemingly firm foundations was reared the logical structure of absolutism. The Catholic faith itself, as represented by Bossuet, was reasonable: free from the sombre fanaticism of Spain or Scotland, free from the laxity of Italy, free from the asceticism of the Jansenists, free from slavish obedience to Rome, reconciled through Malebranche with the rationalism of Descartes. This harmony between the aspirations of the nation and the traditional expression of its culture gave us the classical period *par excellence*: an age of intellectual serenity, yet richer and more complex than modern critics are apt to allow. But that equilibrium could not last. It was threatened long before the end of Louis XIV.* By the middle of the eighteenth century, the divorce between reason and tradition had become radical. The Encyclopædists denounce "superstitions, abuses, privileges." On the intellectual battlefield, their victory was so complete that we are at present tempted to smile at their excessive efforts: there were no

* Cf., in literature, the "quarrel of the Ancient and the Modern."

PAUL BOURGET

conservative philosophers of their own size to oppose them. The Ancient Régime had lost faith in itself long before its downfall. The King said: "After us the Deluge!" And the nobility did their best to call the deluge upon their own generation. They laughed approval at the most destructive witticisms of Figaro. It seemed as though no man in his senses, about 1789, would dare to defend mere "tradition" against "reason."

Then the deluge came—a deluge of blood. The members of the nobility and clergy who survived found less charm in "reason." But the strongest and most curious effect was on the Third Estate or *Bourgeoisie*, who had made the Revolution. The *bourgeois* were not, as Siéyès would have us believe, the whole of the nation: they were a privileged order like the other two, whose interests were bound up with certain traditions, above all with that of hereditary property. Hardly had they achieved their own ends and dragged down the upper orders to their own level, when the tide of reaction set in. Death was decreed against whoever should propose an "agrarian law."*

* *I.e.*, a law tending to the redistribution of landed property.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

cratic revolution was checked; and with the advent of Bonaparte, in 1799, all that was still available of "the Ancient Régime" was hastily restored. We do not wish to imply that this change of front on the part of the bourgeoisie was due exclusively, or even primarily, to selfishness and fear: it had nobler motives, humanitarian and spiritual. France was then ready for those great theorists of reaction whom their disciple a generation later, Barbey d'Aurevilly, aptly termed "the prophets of the past." Independently of each other, Chateaubriand, Lamennais during the first part of his career, Joseph de Maistre and de Bonald, preached the same doctrine: the doctrine best expressed perhaps by Burke in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, the ideal of organic growth as opposed to radical reconstruction, the sanctity of tradition, or, in Burke's boldly paradoxical terms, the wisdom of prejudice. The political revolution in France was thus followed by an intellectual revolution in the opposite direction.

For a long time, it was the turn of the believers in human reason to be eclipsed. All the great romanticists at first were reactionary in their thought: Hugo and Michalet as well as Lamar-

PAUL BOURGET

tine and Vigny. Balzac remained to the last the "knight of the throne and the altar." In the years that preceded the Revolution of 1848, the Romanticists were converted to free-thought and democracy—two manifestations of eighteenth-century rationalism. But the heyday of Romanticism was already over.* Meanwhile, the cause of authority and tradition gained a new and formidable champion in the person of Auguste Comte, the father of Positivism, the man who created Sociology, or at least found a name for it. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau sweep irresistibly onward in actual politics: even the Second Empire is a democratic régime, and Napoleon III. a tyrant by the will of the people. But in their hour of practical triumph, these same ideas lose caste, as it were; the rationalism of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, the "immortal principles" of 1789, are no longer defended except by pompous fools like Monsieur Homais.†

The lead of the progressive forces passes from

* The failure of Hugo's *Burgraves* in 1843 marks the beginning of a reaction against Romanticism.

† Homais: the Voltairian druggist in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

rationalism to science. The great revolution of thought which began at the close of the eighteenth century and culminated with Darwin's *Origin of Species* had made science much less contemptuous of tradition, much less iconoclastic, than rationalism had been: there is an abyss between Voltaire and Renan, between d'Holbach and Taine. Yet the conservative elements, and in particular the Catholic Church, were not satisfied with their partial victory: they demanded the unconditional surrender of human reason to authority and tradition; and as science could not comply, it was treated as the enemy. Now it happened that the two most influential exponents of the scientific philosophy, Renan and Taine, frightened by the horrors of the Commune, went over to the camp of reaction: Renan's book, *The Intellectual and Moral Reformation (of France)*, is still an arsenal of arguments for the traditionalist. But, after a period of weary conservatism, and a longer period of smiling scepticism, Renan veered slowly back to the ideal of his youth, and, on his death-bed, decided to publish his "thoughts of 1848," *The Future of Science*. Taine's mind, less finely balanced, did not swing back: he spent the last

PAUL BOURGET

twenty years of his life ruining the legend of the great Revolution, battering down Jacobin rationalism with the ram of his impassioned logic, and, swayed by English and German influences, restoring the indispensable notions of authority, organic growth, tradition. Bourget and Barrès are the disciples of Taine: doctrine, method, and even style, the mark of the imperious Master is on every one of their books. Bourget counts among the greatest privileges of his intellectual life the friendships he has formed with Taine among his elders, with Barrès among his younger contemporaries, with Maurras as the representative of a new generation. Barrès places Taine almost on a level with Napoleon as a "professor of energy," but even Taine has now been left behind. His conservatism, his traditionalism were still based on science, and ultimately on human reason: Bourget attacked science itself in his novel *The Disciple*, and Brunetière proclaimed "the bankruptcy of science"—a famous catchword. In literature, the traditionalists are in almost undisputed possession of the field. Anatole France seemed to be with them during the earlier part of his career. At the height of his fame, he was a

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Pyrrhonian rather than a rationalist; even before the war, he had relapsed into spiritual nihilism; and his excursion into socialism has not greatly increased his glory. Zola?—Zola had undoubted genius, and he sided with the rationalists and the scientists. But his unsavoury notoriety worked against him, and, as a thinker, he was not very far removed from Monsieur Homais.

A paradoxical situation indeed: in free-thinking, revolutionary France, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the literary élite is overwhelmingly conservative, not to say reactionary. Does this conflict prove that Radicals are fools, or that *littérateurs* are knaves? By no means. It merely affords us a striking instance of what we have called the misrepresentative quality of literature. And before we can proceed with the study of Bourget's theses, we have to discount that "misrepresentative quality."

Literature is not seldom a reaction against the facts of life, rather than a true interpretation thereof: just because democracy is spreading so irresistibly, because its advantages are obvious to the average mind, reaction hath charms for the subtler and more aristocratic intellects of

PAUL BOURGET

professional writers. Their chivalry is enlisted on the side of "a slowly dying cause." In every writer, even those of the sharpest wit, there lurks a Chateaubriand or a Byron, a sentimentalist who enjoys the part he is playing not primarily because it is right, but because it is poetic. When the people were oppressed, it may have been noble to side with them: since the advent of universal suffrage, the glamour is on the other side. More matter-of-fact influences are at work. Authors are *bourgeois* through their education and their interests, even though they were born among peasants or mechanics. For their literary, financial and social success, they have to depend upon the educated reading public—that is to say, upon the upper, and upper middle, class; unconsciously—I would not for the world ascribe to them any degrading insincerity or snobbishness—they must espouse the prejudices of that class. This is particularly true of Paul Bourget: we shall see how he revels in the chronicling of "high life." With lesser men, it may be feared that traditionalism is simply part of the equipment of a gentleman, the "white carnation"* that must grace his buttonhole.

* The white carnation is the political badge of the Royalist.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

There is a deeper reason for these conservative tendencies of literary men. After all, literature is essentially conservative. Our enjoyment of any work of art is seldom absolutely spontaneous: it is based on a training, which itself reposes on canons, or models, or traditions. We may smile at the antiquated conception according to which "culture" consists in having read certain books: but smiling will not alter facts, and, shorn, let us hope, of its excesses, this conception rules us to-day. "Style" must conform to certain standards—were it only those of grammar; and it is history rather than logic that slowly shapes these standards for us. Quotations are pedantic: but much of the charm of style consists in veiled, half-conscious allusions, through which we draw on past treasures, and impart to words and phrases more than their plain everyday value. You will not be credited with "good taste" unless you fall in line, in the main, with the procession headed by critics and professors: always the worship of the past! Not so with science and industry. They live in an eternal To-Day. Nothing is true for a scientist simply because Newton and Lavoisier said so. Indeed it is not necessary that you

PAUL BOURGET

should think of Newton and Lavoisier at all. There is nothing an engineer loves so well as to send his predecessor's machinery to the scrap-heap.

It might be entertaining to imagine what would happen, if the radical spirit of engineering should prevail in art and literature. The worship of tradition would be voted a superstition—a huge joke, and a dull one at that, perpetrated and handed down by the self-perpetuating aristocracy of culture. Three-fourths of our so-called classics would go to the scrap-heap. Our own English tongue needs overhauling: why remain for ever bound by the haphazard, artificial grammar of our ancestors, when the prattle of every child shows us that regularity and logic alone are natural ?* Meanwhile, we demur even at simplified spelling.

No radical are we, especially in questions of culture; and the vision of a literary world remodelled by engineers—even by such a splendid barbarian as H. G. Wells—is by no means pleasing to our mind. Neither should the engineering world be governed by the sentimental tradition-

* If our children were not artificially checked, we would get rid of all irregular verbs in the space of one generation.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

worship that prevails, and must prevail, in art and literature. When it comes to the governance of human affairs, it is at least an open question whether the engineering or the artistic spirit should be supreme; and it must be confessed that the former provides the motive power, whilst the latter is at best a useful check. Bourget and his school may be performing a necessary task, like the tugboats which, on the river Clyde, *follow*, instead of preceding, the large steamers, in order to steady them against dangerous currents. It may be an excellent thing for a democracy to tow in its wake an aristocratic literature: but the essential factor is progressive democracy.

We have sketched—with caricatural roughness, no doubt—the evolution of the doctrine of tradition in modern French thought. We may now examine the special colouring that this doctrine assumed in the works of Paul Bourget.

PAUL BOURGET

§ 2. PAUL BOURGET AS A PSYCHOLOGIST.

Many-sided culture—The chronicler of Parisian elegance—
Amiel's disease—"Un cochon triste."

Paul Bourget is a man of broad culture and versatile interests. He gave great promise as a poet, and might have been the rival and successor of Sully-Prudhomme in the limited and aristocratic domain of psychological elegy. His work as a literary critic is considerable in bulk, and of great significance. Few books have created a deeper impression than his *Essays in Contemporary Psychology*. The articles of "impressionists" like Jules Lemaître and Anatole France have incomparably more charm; the studies of Brunetière bear evidence of more erudition: but Bourget is the most penetrating of all, and the one that most irresistibly compels us to think of things worth while. In analyzing his masters, from Stendhal and Baudelaire to Amiel and Turgenev, he has given us an invaluable document on his own generation. He has diagnosed what we may call the second "mal du siècle," Amiel's disease, the morbid paralysis of the will due to excessive introspection. He is a master of travel literature. Not a mere

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

painter, like Gautier; not a lyric poet, like Loti: in this, as in his criticism, he is the disciple of Taine: his picturesqueness is the brilliant result of a visible effort, and the background of every description is a theory to test, or rather to prove. He is an analyst, careful and well-informed. On England, Italy, and America (*Outre-Mer*), he has left us studies of enduring value. He is well-versed in languages and literatures, both classical and modern. In art-criticism and in physiology, he is at least an intelligent amateur: Taine again, and at every turn! We have the greatest respect for a novelist who is naught but a novelist, provided he be a good one. But some of Bourget's works might be considered as typical "yellow-backs," and it may not be idle to show that their author is no mere Parisian clubman. However risky his subjects may be, he is more liable to fall into pedantry than into frivolousness.

There is therefore an aspect of Bourget's novels that we may dismiss at once as unimportant, although obtrusive and intensely disagreeable: the chronicling of Parisian and cosmopolitan "high-life." It were idle to deny that there is in Bourget an element of downright

PAUL BOURGET

snobbishness. He comes from that climbing and envious class, the lesser bourgeoisie, and is delighted to hobnob with authentic counts and barons of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. He describes dresses, coiffures, jewellery, with a minuteness and an accuracy which would be a credit to the society column of the London illustrated papers. He is an expert upholsterer, an authority on bric-à-brac, a connoisseur in perfumes, a gourmet, a faultless dresser and a grand master of etiquette. All that must be of breathless interest to shopgirls: to a normal man it is somewhat nauseating. But this is only a foible, not the essence of Bourget's talent. And it must be added that he has depicted, with a power not far short of Balzac's, social surroundings which were by no means aristocratic. There are few portrayals of lower middle-class life that are more convincing than the household of Adrien Sixte in *The Disciple* or the home of the poet René Vinci, in *Lies*. If Bourget knows the latest fashion in flounces, he can also tell us the price of butter.*

* At least he could twenty years ago. In a recent work, *L'Étape*, the description of the Monneron family is by no means convincing.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Without any undue turn for the paradoxical, an admirer of Paul Bourget might find some good excuse for the alleged snobbishness of his favourite writer. The art of Paul Bourget is classical in character: its ideal—the French ideal—is one of combined concentration and lucidity, obtained by the elimination of the irrelevant. A French novel, like a French drama, is not primarily a work of gorgeous fancy, or humour, or passion, but a psychological study reduced to its essential terms, the study of a crisis. A book like *Lorna Doone*, in which the story, good as it is, is but a pretext for delightful digressions, is radically un-French. In its extreme form, a French work of fiction becomes almost schematic: it describes a conflict between characters as general as those of the old Moralities. Now, in order to realize that high degree of abstraction without absolutely sacrificing verisimilitude, the Classics set their plays among the kings and queens of antiquity; thus material details could be omitted; naught but a tragedy of souls remained. What is the modern literary equivalent for the semi-fabulous princes of old? Why, the idle aristocracy of to-day, for they have the leisure, the freedom from financial worries,

PAUL BOURGET

the absence of professional deformations and cares, which enable the writer to reduce material details to a minimum. The heroes and heroines of Bourget's earlier novels may be called "prepared psychological specimens"; they are preserved in a sterile milieu; hence Octave Mirbeau's jibe that, for Bourget, no one had a soul unless he also had 40,000 francs a year. Naturally enough, with such elements only a limited kind of experiments can be performed. Almost the only reagent that the writer has not eliminated is the universal acid—love. So the typical Bourget story is a love crisis, involving three or at most four or five people, deliberately unpicturesque, artificial in its bold simplification, and yet claiming universal significance. In other words, if Bourget lingers so blissfully among the four hundred, it is because he is the successor of Racine.

Bourget's special domain is the psychological novel. In this field his direct masters were Gustave Flaubert and Balzac, but especially Henri Beyle, or Stendhal. Balzac and Flaubert were keen analysts of individual characters or passions: but their ambition was to give a total picture of life. For Stendhal, and for Bourget

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

after him, psychology, instead of being one of the elements, became the chief purpose of the work. Stendhal himself, who wrote in the thirties of the last century, had said: "I shall be understood about 1880"—a prophecy which was fulfilled with curious exactitude. Not only did Bourget borrow from Stendhal his general method: the very structure of his most famous novel, *The Disciple*, comes straight from *Red and Black*.

Bourget's psychology shows us wheels within wheels. It does not so much consist in the analysis of a state of mind, as in the analysis of analysis. About 1880, for a number of reasons that we have attempted to sketch in our first chapter, there was in Europe—in Russia, in Germany, and especially in France—a disparity between the power of intellectual analysis and the power of action. The world seemed to be stricken with Hamlet's disease: thought paralyzing energy. Of this malady, the best known expression is Amiel's Journal. The Barrès who wrote *Under the Eyes of the Barbarians*, with his glorification of introspection as a method of self-culture, is one of the last representatives of that tendency. Bourget was accused of spreading

PAUL BOURGET

the disease which he described: he had no difficulty in refuting the charge. His chief problem was to study the effects of conscious analysis in a weak soul: the scruples, inhibitions, deformations, morbidities, which such analysis must needs engender. I mentioned *Hamlet*: one of the best among Bourget's early books, *André Cornélis*, is a reworking of Shakespeare's tragedy in modern garb. Bourget's conclusion is that introspection has a depressing influence; that the surest way of failing to see the truth is to go about with a microscope. In *A Crime of Love*, in *The Promised Land*, we see how utterly blind and unjust a man can be when he trains on a genuine affection the destructive weapons of his analysis. Analysis is safe enough in the hands of a scientist: in the hands of a lover, it breeds diffidence, jealousy, hatred. Finally, in *The Disciple*, he shows us a man who, not satisfied with analyzing the sentiments which come spontaneously within his ken, creates conditions for the express purpose of carrying out an experiment. Robert Greslou sets before himself the psychological task of seducing a noble and trustful girl, in order to see how she will react. The result is death. The girl's brother, a soldier,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

whose thought is simple, straight and sure, shoots down the young "scientist" who had performed that heartless piece of vivisection. Whilst analysis mars or destroys genuine sentiment, whilst it cannot create love, it is powerless to root out a passion known to be worthless. In *Lies* and in *Physiology of Modern Love*, Larcher is conscious that his enslavement to Colette is degrading: but the analysis of his own degradation tortures him without curing him. Nay, it makes his disease worse, it gives his sin a strange power of morbid fascination. The first lesson derived from Bourget's works is thus curiously self-destructive: his analysis concludes to the condemnation of analysis.

The last two books we have mentioned, *Lies* and *Physiology of Modern Love*, are singularly daring in their picture of impure passion. In Suzanne Moraines, Bourget has attempted to give us his Valérie Marneffe: the society courtesan, outwardly respectable, and more utterly rotten at heart than her confessed congeners. Colette, a study in blatant perversity, is far less convincing. It is praise enough for Bourget—it would be praise enough for any novelist—to say that he has at times rivalled "the monster him-

PAUL BOURGET

self," Balzac. The *Physiology*—another touch of Balzacian influence*—was published serially in a paper, *Parisian Life*, which was honoured by contributions from Taine himself, and which the American mail would very properly refuse to carry. Even in book form, and somewhat toned down, it remains a work for specialists, like certain medical treatises or like the *Manual of Confessors*, to be kept under lock and key, away from youthful curiosities. It was at that time that Bourget was nicknamed "un cochon triste"—and can you conceive of a more God-forsaken creature than "un cochon triste" (a melancholy swine)? Yet, at the same moment, Bourget was already claiming to be a moralist. His studies, he said, were "anatomical preparations"; and "psychology is to ethics what anatomy is to physiology." We have no right to challenge the sincerity of this defence: but we cannot admit its validity. The pornographic element in Bourget was a form of a collective literary disease—the brutal pessimism which, libellously, called itself realistic or naturalistic. It is in the same strain as Becque's comedies or

* Cf. *Physiologie du Mariage*, by Balzac, and *De l'Amour*, by Stendhal.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Zola's novels; and there are healthy-minded judges who find Zola's stench less nauseating than Bourget's perfumery.

§ 3. PAUL BOURGET AS A MORALIST.

The Disciple—The moral bankruptcy of science—Reconstruction of France on the basis of tradition—Catholicism, indissoluble family, permanent classes—A retrospective Utopia.

Lies ended with a sermon by Father Taconet—one of a long series which was to turn the Alter Ego of Larcher into the successor of Bossuet. It was in *The Disciple* that Bourget appeared, for the first time, consistently and unhesitatingly, on the side of the Angels. Adrien Sixte is a modern saint—a compound of Spinoza, Littré, Vacherot, and Taine. His philosophy is the materialistic determinism which led Taine to write: "Vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar." Robert Greslou is "the disciple" of Adrien Sixte. His master's theories have ruined in him every notion of good and evil. Introduced as a tutor into a private family, he coldly proceeds to seduce his pupil's sister. We have already said that she committed

PAUL BOURGET

suicide, and that her elder brother avenged her. We have three problems in that sombre, repulsive, powerful tale: first of all, the condemnation of analysis in matters of the heart; then, and of much greater importance, the practical responsibility of those who, blameless in their own lives, propound dangerous theories; the third, and chiefest, is the bankruptcy of science as an ethical factor. Sixte is a saint: but he has depraved Greslou. Has he? No more than Jesus has depraved Torquemada. A criminal with a certain turn for logic will easily find some doctrinal justification for his impulses and his misdeeds. A brigand like Bonnot, with a touch of literature, will call himself an Anarchist—perhaps a Darwinian or a Nietzschean. Had Greslou been a practising Catholic, and yet the scamp he was at heart—there is nothing absurd in such an hypothesis—he would have behaved just as badly as the other Catholic heroes of Bourget; as badly as Raymond Casal, for instance, a professional Don Juan who is not pedantic enough to justify his perversities with arguments borrowed from Taine and Spencer.

In so far as Bourget attempts to lay on Adrien Sixte's shoulders the *positive* responsibility for

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Greslou's depravation, I earnestly believe he fails. He is more successful in his claim that science cannot provide a basis for morality. A man relying upon it is clutching a rope of sand. Science tells us what is, not what should be. Take the most obvious case, that of alcoholism. Science can but point out the physiological effects of the poison. But if a man, with his eyes open, still craves for a few minutes of excitement or oblivion, at whatever cost, what can science say to him? It can warn, but not forbid.

Sixte and his fellow-materialists are therefore *negatively* responsible for Greslou, if they have indeed weakened prohibitions for which they have no substitute to offer. Morality consists in inducing the individual to sacrifice his immediate satisfaction for the sake of distant advantages, which may be deferred till after his death, and may not even accrue to himself personally at all. In terms of strict individualism, it does not always pay: nay, it may be called an elaborate system of cheating mankind in detail for the good of the whole. Optimists will tell you that there is in man an innate tendency that makes for righteousness: but the time when

PAUL BOURGET

Bourget wrote *The Disciple*, and indeed the last two generations, was no time for blind optimism. Renan himself doubted whether mankind were not living on its moral capital, with the end of its reserves already in sight: "We act under the empire of ancient customs; we are like those animals whose brains have been removed by physiologists and which continue none the less to perform certain vital functions as the effect of habit. But these instinctive movements will grow weaker and weaker with time. . . . The faith we live by is but the shadow of a shadow. What shall they live by that come after us?"* Moral discipline cannot be maintained except as the result of a slowly changing, overwhelming tradition—except as a beneficent prejudice, whose sole justification is that, on the whole and in the long run, it is beneficent. In France, that overwhelming tradition, which silences the selfish revolt of the individual, is embodied in the Catholic Church. In his bold pictures of sinful love, Bourget has shown whither natural man is led unrestrained by some moral authority not centred in himself. There are diseases of the

* Renan, *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques*, Préface, xix.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

soul, as there are diseases of the flesh. There must be a moral prophylaxy and a moral hygiene. And of these Rome has the secret.

This general principle laid down, Bourget is too logical to balk at details. He advocates a total reconstruction of national life on the lines of the Ancient Régime, a frank return to Catholicism, monarchy, and the system of distinct classes. First of all, the family must be stable: divorce laws are a crime against society. There can be no continuity of effort through the ages, no "family" can become a "house" so long as, with every generation, the family property is divided among all the children: the privilege of the eldest son must be restored. The family must be doubly rooted in its habitat and in its profession: we need dynasties of local merchants, artisans, and farmers. Only by a slow and safe ascent will a family pass from the lower to the upper reaches of its own class; in exceptional cases only, and after the preparation of centuries, can a bourgeois pass into the ranks of the nobility. Thus, instead of our chaotic, feverish, demoralized pseudo-democracy, shall we have an organic society, capable of evolution, but averse to cataclysmic changes; instead of the nefarious

PAUL BOURGET

"rights of man," we shall have a finely adjusted balance between the hereditary privileges of classes and families; at the apex of this living pyramid, the Royal Family, the symbol of tradition, continuity, privilege; the King, whose selfish interest must needs be the interest of the whole nation that supports him as it has supported his father and will support his son. The Church smooths the working of the social machine in the spirit of charity, and assures us that the order which we have to accept here below is divinely appointed, the earthly shadow of the eternal order above.

Paul Bourget is no mystic. His apologetics are based on "scientific" observations. Like other modern champions of reaction, like Auguste Comte himself, like Taine, like Maurras, he is a "positivist." Let us see how his doctrine stands the test of facts.

There is a group of people who hold, almost to a man, the same faith as Paul Bourget: the French nobility. We do not believe that they are rotten or even effete: but their moral superiority over the middle class and the people is not glaring. Indeed, Bourget has complacently described the utter frivolity, the corruption, which

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

are so common in aristocratic circles. We find in his books an array of heroes—or villains—who, in spite of their titles, their loyalty to the Royal cause, their allegiance to the Catholic faith, are gamblers, swindlers, and adulterers. In *L'Emigré*, he attempts to give us an ideal picture of a *Seigneur* of old—the champion and symbol of the hereditary principle, a family portrait breathing and walking among us. But the Marquis de Claviers-Grandchamps is an incorrigible spendthrift—the Napoleonic Code is not solely responsible for the impoverishment of the aristocracy!—and his son, the most attractive character in the story, is a bastard. Julie Monneron* allows herself to be seduced; this is meant to prove that families which have risen too rapidly and skipped the intermediate stages do not rest on a firm moral foundation. But her seducer, Rumesnil, is a scion of the old nobility; and it must be granted that he had his share of responsibility in the ruin of the poor schoolgirl. Shall we say that even Catholics and Monarchists, at the present day, cannot escape the demoralizing influence of free-thought and democracy? But where shall we find the

* *L'Étape*.

PAUL BOURGET

lost Paradise ? Was the France of Louis XV. and the Pompadour, the France of the Regent and Cardinal Dubois, the France of Henry III., Charles IX., Francis I., strikingly more virtuous than the France of Loubet, Fallières and Poincaré ? The Republic had its Panama scandals : the financiers of the Ancient Régime were not above suspicion, and the system of farming out the collection of taxes to private contractors was naught but organized robbery. A company of friends were telling horrific stories about thieves. When Voltaire's turn came, he capped them all with these simple words : " Once upon a time, there was a tax contractor. . . ." Was the Church purer when Talleyrand, Rohan, Dubois, Mazarin, were bishops or cardinals ? Were patriotism and loyalty so deep among the nobility ; and even in the Royal Family, when Condé served the Spaniards against his king, or when Louis XIII. had to fight against his own mother and his own brother ? Where is the " good old France " whose loss we mourn ?— In the name of continuity and tradition, Bourget sweeps aside the whole of the nineteenth century, which is " an error " ; then the whole of the eighteenth, which is poisoned with the ideas of

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Voltaire and Rousseau; then Louis XIV. himself, whose centralizing despotism prepared the Jacobin tyranny. Shall we find our ideal in the sixteenth century, the age of religious strife? At the time of the Hundred Years' War? Under Philippe the Fair, whose agent slapped an aged Pope in the face? The traditionalists must chase as far back as the reign of Saint Louis that retrospective Utopia of theirs, elusive and unsubstantial like the shadow of a dream.

The truth is that Bourget is a partisan, who places at the service of his political and religious opinions his systematic pessimism concerning present conditions, his no less blind optimism concerning the past. In spite of scandals and abuses, old France, we are only too glad to admit, was sound at heart: but so is the France of to-day. And the tragic events of the Great War have ruined Bourget's theories more effectually than any formal refutation. Had peace been preserved, the squabbles of home politics would have continued, wearisome and sordid; the ancient military glory of France would have slowly faded away; and, until a new ideal had set men's souls on fire, the pessimists would have

PAUL BOURGET

had a free field. War came; and the France of Viviani, Briand, Millerand, Sembat, stood the unexampled test with unexampled fortitude. Calmness and dignity in the hour of impending disaster; unshakable determination; infinite patience; efficiency and resourcefulness; at need, the old *furia francese*: these New France—Old France, Eternal France—has shown. Had she been hopelessly wrong for a century and a half, gangrened with foolish and monstrous Utopias, she would no longer exist as a nation: she would be a mob of helots under the Prussian sword.

Voltaire again—I wish he were here to dispose of our modern Nonottes and Patouilletts—was told that coffee was a slow poison. The patriarch was then eighty years old. He went on sipping his tenth cup that day, and remarked: “Very slow indeed!” Apparently democracy is slower still.

Even though Bourget’s doctrines were as sound as they seem to us fanciful, we might doubt whether a writer of fiction is well-advised in posing as a sociologist or as a theologian. A novel with a purpose is apt to be one-sided and mechanical as a work of art; and as an argu-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

ment, it can never be thoroughly convincing. Even supposing the fiction to be based upon fact: an isolated incident proves nothing; its universal, representative value has to be established; and the same fact is capable of conflicting interpretations. Bourget, for instance, gave us a book which showed some of the difficulties arising from a divorce, even under the most favourable circumstances: at the time when the divorce law was under discussion, the French stage was flooded with plays showing the evils of indissoluble marriage. Even Bourget's own story could be rewritten, without altering the characters or the situations, against his main thesis. We do not want to make this condemnation of the "problem novel" too sweeping. The discussion of ideas is a sport that no genuine Frenchman would be willing to forego. A writer can legitimately arouse sentiment or excite interest about some social or spiritual problem. Whatever may be our opinion as to their artistic value, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Lay Down Your Arms!* and *Robert Elsmere*, were useful contributions to the progress of great causes. The denunciation of abuses by Dickens has not impaired his powers as a novelist. In

PAUL BOURGET

contemporary French literature, *The Disenchanted* and *Colette Baudoche* combine a "purpose" with human interest and poetic charm. All these works are descriptions of conditions, rather than discussions of ideas. Bourget is too keen a critic not to be conscious of the weakness of dogmatic fiction (*littérature à thèse*); he claims to be a dispassionate servant of truth; his novels are not sermons, but studies; and as for certain classes of men, especially in modern France, abstract ideas are of deeper import than personal ambition and even love, he is justified in making ideas rather than individuals the true heroes of his stories (*littérature d'idées*). The plea is specious. Bourget is not a disinterested observer; facts are selected by him in such a way, and presented in such a light, as to produce upon the reader a definite impression. The author does not exclaim at the end: *Quod erat demonstrandum!* but he visibly hopes that we shall be led to say it for ourselves. If it is not "literature with a thesis," it is at least "literature with a tendency." He makes a great show of fairness; in all his latest works, in *The Tribune*, *The Barricade*,* *A Divorce*, *The Demon*

* These last two are dramas.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of *Midday*, *The Probation Stage*, *The Sense of Death*, the men whose opinions he condemns are, individually, strong and well-meaning. But this fairness is only the feint of a skilful fencer: he hopes thereby to make his final thrust more telling.

Yet, in these sociological treatises, the old technical skill of the novelist is not altogether lacking; the power of psychological analysis, confined within narrower limits by the need of establishing a doctrine, is still great; and there are documentary pages on modern movements* that the historian of culture cannot afford to neglect. *Lies* may be a more perfect piece of psychological fiction: but the productions of Bourget's last period set you thinking about more vital problems than the perversities of Suzanne and Colette.

I am sure my readers have felt all the time the difficulty under which I was labouring in this chapter, a difficulty which I have not attempted to conceal. I do not like Paul Bourget. I am not absolutely convinced of his

* Syndicalism in *The Barricade*; the University Settlements, or Popular Universities, in *The Probation Stage* (*L'Étape*), Modernism in *The Demon of Midday*.

PAUL BOURGET

sincerity. I am painfully conscious of constant effort and artifice in his style, and of a taste for the abnormal in his psychology. His doctrine seems to me one-sided and depressing. I would cheerfully give all his works, antehumous and posthumous, for *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* or *The Iceland Fisherman*. Yet I am ready to confess that he is a singularly intelligent man; that his novels, unconvincing as they may be, have the effect of rousing discussion; and that they can be read with a mixture of irritation and pleasure. It was with a sigh of immense relief that I came to the end of his thirty or forty volumes; it is with the same feeling that I reach the end of this chapter; and, whether he be a Radical or a Traditionalist, I am sure that on this point at least my reader will agree with me.

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CHAPTER VI
MAURICE BARRÈS

CHAPTER VI.

MAURICE BARRÈS.

THAT Anatole France, the antiquarian, the dilettante, the epicure, should have become Comrade Anatole France, spokesman of the *Conscious Proletariat* and herald of the Social Revolution; that Jean Richepin, the "Turanian," the Gipsy, the Gueux, Rebellion incarnate, should have turned into an Academician, a Patriot, one of the favourite lecturers of orthodox Respectability; that Paul Bourget, the chronicler of Suzanne, Colette, and other ladies fair and frail, should have ascended the pulpit of Bossuet and fulminated against the heresies of the modern world: these are a few of the amazing metamorphoses provided within the last quarter of a century by the great Parisian kaleidoscope. Hardly less singular is the case of Maurice Barrès. Anarchism, esoteric symbolism, decadent romanticism, are not the most obvious paths for a future defender of Tradition to tread. Yet they seem to have led Barrès—guided by some subtle

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

logic of his own—to a position not widely different from that of his friend Bourget. Bourget is the moralist of the school; Charles Maurras its political philosopher; both are committed to the support of Catholicism and Monarchy. Maurice Barrès, more elusive and more impassioned than either, is the poet rather than the theorist of those subconscious influences, ancestral and local, which create in men's souls a sense of their nationality. French "Nationalism," as a political party, has proved a failure; as a sentiment, its potency at the present day can hardly be exaggerated. In last analysis, the problem around which the Great War is raging is this: "What is a nation?" And because this problem is the keynote of Barrès's works, they assume for us a tragic significance.

§ 1. THE NOVELS OF MAURICE BARRÈS.

- (i.) "Ego-Worship" : Analysis—Belated Baudelairianism.
- (ii.) Politics: Boulanger—*The Romance of National Energy*.
- (iii.) *The Uprooted* and Regionalism—*The Eastern Bastions—The Inspired Hill*.

In 1888—he was then twenty-six—the young Lorrainer Maurice Barrès astonished Paris as the high priest of a new cult—"le culte du Moi"

MAURICE BARRÈS

(Ego-worship). Such is the collective title of his first three novels, *Under the Eyes of the Barbarians*, *A Free Man*, *The Garden of Berenice*. Novels? It is impossible to tag any label on these strange concoctions, which the author himself calls "ideologies." A minimum of fact, a certain element of psycho-picturesque description, symbols, reflections, meditations—a farrago of Ignatius de Loyola, Stendhal, Heine, and not a few others: the result is wilful, absurd, exasperating to a degree, yet with undeniable powers of fascination. It belongs to that esoteric literature which is so dear to very young people. The element of conscious mystification is not lacking either—as in the symbolic poetry of Mallarmé, the Rosicrucian revival of Sâr Joséphin Péladan, or, in more recent years, Post-Impressionist Art. Maurice Barrès became a power among a widening circle of initiated. But there was sense and energy in the man, in spite of his affectations. His "culte du Moi" is no passive worship: it implies the cultivation as well as the adoration of the Ego. And, different in this respect from certain developments of Nietzscheism, it is made ethically palatable through its respect for other individuali-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

ties. It is corrected by the Kantian reverence for human personality, or simply by the golden rule. When translated into a language understood of the people, there is nothing unacceptable in the anarchism of his pamphlet *Toute licence sauf contre l'Amour*. This flamboyant title might be rendered: "In non-essentials, liberty; in all things, Charity."

The three principles of Ego-worship are quite typical, not merely of Barrès, but of a great part of French literature. "(1) We are never so happy as when we are in a state of exaltation; (2) The pleasure of exaltation is greatly increased through analysis; (3) Consequently, we must feel as much as possible whilst analyzing as much as possible." Most of us, I am sure, would demur at the minor premise. Analysis seems to imply the destruction rather than the intensification of feeling. To be consciously, wilfully, analytically passionate seems to us a contradiction in terms. This was one of the lessons that we thought we could accept at the hands of that arch-analyst, Bourget. But need this always be so? Why should analysis destroy sentiment, if the sentiment be genuine and the analysis accurate? To feel without daring to consider

MAURICE BARRÈS

why is a sign of intellectual or moral cowardice. It is of a piece with the prudence of Don Quixote, who refrained from submitting a second time his pasteboard helmet to the test of his sword. Everything that is worth feeling is worth thinking about. Nor is this doctrine incompatible with Bourget's. Amiel analyzed his own infirmity of purpose, and made it incurable; de Querne,* Nayrac,† analyzed their diffidence; and it grew till it wrecked their love and their life; Larcher‡ analyzed the degrading passion that he wanted to tear away from his heart; and its roots struck deeper. In all cases, analysis enhances the feeling which is submitted to it; if the result is lamentable, the fault lies, not with the process, but with its object. Bring analysis to bear upon faith instead of upon doubt; and faith will grow as doubt had grown; you will have Saint Augustine or Saint Ignatius instead of Frédéric Amiel. I think I have played conscientiously the part of "Advocatus Barresii": I must now confess that in the third part of his trilogy, *The Garden of Berenice*, Barrès pulls down much of his own logical scaffolding. Bere-

* *Un Crime d'Amour*.

† *La Terre Promise*.

‡ *Mensonges, Physiologie de l'Amour Moderne*.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

nice is a simple soul, primitive and pure, in spite of degrading experiences, close to nature, bathed in the unconscious. The poet recognizes in her a force, a virtue, that his conscious analysis, unaided, cannot attain.

Before Barrès found his final way, his Ego-worship tempted him into the dangerous path of Baudelaire. To feel as intensely as possible, yet with a clear, analytical brain; to consider the world and your own soul as instruments upon which to perform the most subtle symphonies of sensation and sentiment—why, that leads straight to the cold-blooded perversities of *The Flowers of Evil*. And Barrès's book, *Blood, Pleasure, and Death*, is essentially, in title and in treatment, a product of the Baudelairian spirit. That strain has never been wholly eliminated from the thought of Maurice Barrès. In 1903, after an active political life, and half a dozen volumes which, in the main, were strong and wholesome, he went back, in *Amori and Dolori Sacrum*, to the depraved romanticism of *Blood, Pleasure, and Death*. The first and most important part of the book is devoted to Venice. But what Barrès loves in that incomparable city is the subtle fever, the morbidity, the decay,

MAURICE BARRÈS

the delicate corruption, which fill his soul with complicated, and all the more delicious, melancholy. The Barrès of Venice is first cousin to Des Esseintes, the grotesque hero of Huysmans' *A Rebours*, for whom incipient putrefaction and deliquescence had irresistible charms. There are people, we are told, who like their Roquefort green and their venison high. We understand that, after being so nearly engulfed in the morass of Baudelairianism, Barrès should have felt the need of a support, of a discipline from without. His "nationalism," after all, made a man of him.

In 1889, Barrès was a candidate for Parliament under the auspices of General Boulanger. He was but twenty-seven, and looked so much younger that many of his constituents took him for his own son. At first, his fellow *littérateurs** thought that his one desire was to enrich his collection of sensations. And he did play at times in Parliament the part of an ironist detached from party interests. When the Chamber voted to transfer to the Pantheon the remains of a number of Republican worthies, Barrès moved that the name of Jules Simon be

* E.g., Jules Lemaitre.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

added to the list. Now that venerable fossil was still sitting in the French Senate, claiming to be alive. The Speaker asked in all seriousness whether Mr. Barrès wished to press his motion. "Oh," replied the young deputy, "I am in no particular hurry. But unless Jules Simon looks sharp, there will be no room left for him." Yet there was in Barrès a certain germ of sincerity and earnestness, which, I believe, has grown, until at present, the man must be considerably more than half sincere.

The demagogic agitation led by General Boulanger was a mixture of all primitive instincts—democracy, *revanche*, thirst for glory, hero-worship. Barrès sought in it more than an exciting game. As he told us in *Berenice*, he was aware of the limitations of his cultured and analytical self: he wanted then to enrich it by a plunge into the unconscious, by communion with the primitive soul of the people, that soul which Boulanger embodied for a moment. Barrès was an active lieutenant of the popular leader, and remained faithful to him in failure, in exile, in death—after the General's sentimental suicide over the tomb of his mistress at

MAURICE BARRÈS

Brussels. Faithful, but without illusion, even as Chateaubriand after 1830. His hero-worship had not long blinded him. He soon saw what a mediocre personage Boulanger was—a man without originality of thought, without dignity of character, without strength of purpose, just a handsome soldier with a blond beard and a black horse. We owe to Barrès's political experience two books which unfortunately purport to be novels, *The Appeal to the Soldier* and *Their Faces*—the latter a description of the Panama scandals. The fictitious elements—the thin veil covering the autobiographical passages, and a totally irrelevant love affair—could profitably be removed, and then we would have the most picturesque and passionate memoirs in the French language since the days of Saint-Simon. The superficial charm and the hopeless frivolity of Boulanger, his scruples and his weaknesses, the melancholy of his failure, the electric atmosphere of Parliament, the tragedies of corruption, hatred, and fear, and especially the epic description of Parisian crowds, heaving, tossing, and foaming in their changing moods have inspired Barrès with pages that neither history nor literature can well afford to forget. It is an authentic

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

chronicle of our own drab Yesterday, but intense and vivid to a degree rarely equalled by the best historical romances. Barrès has remained almost constantly in active politics since the time of Boulanger's venture. After taking a brilliant part in that ill-fated movement, and in the revenge of the defeated Boulangists, the Panama agitation, he was one of the leaders of the Anti-Dreyfusists, one of the strongest opponents of the religious policy of the radicals, one of the protagonists in the bellicose revival of the last decade. Some of his political books, like *Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism*, or *The Great Distress of the Churches of France*, contain pages as perfect as the best in his purely literary works.

The Appeal to the Soldier and *Their Faces* are the second and third parts of a trilogy under the collective title: *The Romance of National Energy*. The first novel of the series, *The Uprooted*, has proved to be one of the influential books published within the last twenty years. The "Uprooted" (*déracinés*) are those young men estranged from their natural surroundings by moving to Paris; and, worse still, estranged from the culture of their race by the cosmopolitan ideal of

MAURICE BARRÈS

such denationalized dreamers as Kant.* They are young trees that will bear bitter fruit or none at all, in an uncongenial soil. The moral of the book is: "Back to your province, which has moulded your ancestors and yourselves; where you feel the close kinship of field, wood, and river; of church, castle, and cottage; where you are in line with an immemorial tradition! Root yourselves again into your native ground."

The author claims that this doctrine is a natural development of Ego-worship. He had sought self-realization in cultured anarchy, and found it wanting: his Ego could not develop in a vacuum. He had tried to commune with the popular soul: but without a principle to guide him, he found it vague and shifting. His Self is not isolated and autonomous. It is a part of a larger whole. It is determined, as Taine had taught, by "race, surroundings, and time." To recognize these limitations implies no abdication. On the contrary, you are never more completely

* At the Lycée of Nancy, Barrès studied philosophy under Burdeau, later on one of the prominent statesmen of the Third Republic, and savagely pilloried in *The Romance of National Energy* under the name of Bouteiller.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

yourself than when you bring to consciousness the obscure forces at work within you. By so doing, you follow the cardinal precept of Ego-worship: to feel as much as possible whilst analyzing as much as possible. To feel as much as possible: this you achieve through communion with like-minded people and in the most favourable surroundings. Deep is the sombre joy of spiritual isolation, enhanced by the physical presence of a hostile crowd; deeper still, and more lasting, is the consciousness of harmony, of fellowship in time and space. Why do we congregate to pray according to ancient rituals, whilst the question is to save our own individual soul? Enlightened individualism must transcend Self. Thus Ego-worship leads to Nationalism, and Nationalism is defined as "the acceptation of a determinism, the two principal terms of which are 'la terre et les morts' (the soil and the dead)."

We may doubt the cogency of Barrès's arguments: we cannot deny the tonic effect that his "nationalism" has had on his life and on his art. Let us be thankful that he did rise from the esoteric subtleties of *Under the Eyes of the Barbarians* and the decaying romanticism of

MAURICE BARRÈS

Blood, Pleasure, and Death, to the classic purity and strength of *The Eastern Bastions*.

The Eastern Bastions of French culture are Alsace and Lorraine. Barrès studies the problems of the two annexed provinces in those admirable novels: *In the German Service* and *Colette Baudoche*. Life under a foreign yoke is a constant humiliation and a constant temptation. It were so easy to renounce one's sentimental traditions, and to pass over to the conquerors, ever ready with their bribes ! Alsatians and Lorrainers have to choose between the outward humiliation and discomfort of remaining among the conquered, and the inner humiliation of disowning their own past. Ehrich is a young Strasbourg burgher ; he might, like so many of his cousins, have crossed the frontier and served in the French Army. But he feels that his duty to Alsace and to French culture is to remain at home, a rock of resistance against German encroachments. And, in the German Army, his duty as an Alsatian is to be a good soldier, to compel the respect of his officers and comrades, whilst making it plain that, under the yoke, he remains unconquered. Where is Ehrich to-day ? Did he manage to

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

escape before the declaration of war? Was he shot, like other Alsatian notables, in the first few weeks of the conflict? Or is he compelled to serve against the friends and allies of his French brothers? I hope Barrès will give us some day the tragic sequel of Ehrich's career "in the German Service." *Colette Baudoche* is a humble young girl of Metz. A Prussian Doctor of Philosophy and High School teacher rents a room in her home. He is kindly, although pedantic and somewhat uncouth. He falls in love with the French girl, so refined in her simplicity. He breaks for her sake his engagement with the superb Brunhild who is waiting for him in far-off Koenigsberg. Colette respects him and likes him—not without a touch of amusement. But she attends a Mass for the Dead at the Cathedral—the great ceremony through which the French element expresses its loyalty to its past. She cannot break with her people and her tradition. She refuses the German Professor.

Both novels are composed and written with classical simplicity. They are absolutely free from sentimental clap-trap. The author recognizes frankly that Alsace-Lorraine prospered

MAURICE BARRÈS

under the efficient rule of Germany. The conquerors are not uniformly presented as vulgar-ians, gluttons, pedants, and swashbucklers. The problem is ethical, unaffected by material considerations. It is a problem that the English-speaking nations might do well to ponder upon. Because they have never gone through the same harrowing experience, they do not realize what it means to be a conquered people—even though the conquerors were as efficient as the Germans, as just as the English, as good-natured as the Americans. No amount of good government can make up to a nation for any loss in her spiritual heritage. Independence may become a mere farce under the petty tyranny of native politicians: yet it does not allow the people's soul to be crushed or warped as it is under the best foreign domination. We wonder at the ingratitude of the Egyptians and the Filipinos, who never were so well administered as under England's or America's rule. We fail to understand their reply: "We do not ask you to govern us well: we want you to leave us alone." This ever-rankling wound of the conquest is felt more bitterly by a proud population like that of Alsace-Lorraine, who still cherishes a belief in

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

the superiority of its French culture. But it would be a great mistake to imagine that our Asiatic and African brothers do not feel it in their own way. Imperialism would assume a new complexion, if the self-satisfied good people at home could experience in their own souls some of the sufferings inflicted in its name.*

Barrès's art in these two books is seen at his best, like his thought. Although the characters are symbolical, they are also simply and profoundly human. There is an austere restraint in plot and style, which might repel the casual reader. *Colette Baudoche* in particular is quiet, unobtrusive, almost colourless, like a landscape of Lorraine, or like the eyes of the heroine. To the initiated, this simplicity recalls the tragedies of Racine, whilst the spirit is that of Corneille.

The last book of Barrès in narrative form—it can hardly be called a novel—*The Inspired Hill*, is one of the strangest and most fascinating in modern French literature. It tells the true story of three brothers, the Baillards, who all became Catholic priests. The eldest, Leopold,

* Yet dismembered France annexed more territories after 1871 than any other nation except England.

MAURICE BARRÈS

was a man of boundless ambition and devouring energy. He revived an ancient pilgrimage on the "sacred hill" of Lorraine, the Abbey of Sion-Vaudémont. He extended his influence to Ste.-Odile in Alsace. But his undertakings came to grief; his superiors had never fully approved of his spirit and methods even in the hour of success; when he failed, he was severely censured and reduced to the small parish of Saxon, near Sion. The proud man and his small band of fanatics cannot accept their downfall. We are in 1850: France is still feverish with wild Messianic dreams. The Baillards, estranged at heart from the Roman Church, as Lamennais had been in the preceding generation, fall under the influence of a mystagogue, one of the innumerable prophets of those stormy days, Vintras. They start a small Church of the new Christianity on the hill of Sion. Devotion they have, enough and to spare; and, in their madness, some indelible traces of peasant common sense. Their prestige is still great in that countryside, where they have been spiritual leaders, creators of prosperity, almost feudal lords. Yet they cannot defy the forces of Universal Rome. The new government, the Second Empire, is for the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

first few years of its history a repressive autocracy, closely allied with the Church. The Bailards are defeated once more. The little band is driven from its stronghold, dispersed; the heroes of that strange episode live on, obscurely, for many years—Leopold as late as 1883. To all outward appearances, they are harmless and commonplace enough: at heart, they are seers still, burning with prophetic flames. On his death-bed, Leopold is at last reconciled with the Church.

Whoever seeks in a French yellow-back naught but sparkling frivolity had better eschew this book, captivating but austere. As a study of the unbalanced and millennarian "generation of '48," it is of surpassing interest. Never had Barrès shown greater qualities of minute realism, shot through with poetry. The humble life of the little community at Sion, with all its petty material difficulties, and yet with a door ever open on the mysterious Beyond; the local and historical atmosphere; the subtle differences between the characters, their interaction, their evolution: all that is rendered with a wealth of sympathy and humour wellnigh unique among recent productions. Most important of all is

MAURICE BARRES

the symbolism of the book, the great problem which it represents to the mind of a "nationalist." Sion-Vaudémont is a natural place of worship. It antedates Lorraine, France, Gaul, and perhaps Christianity itself. We all have felt, on the height of some noble hill, with an illimitable expanse at our feet, that this was the place to pray. Had we been born of the soil, had we grown within the shadow of that hill, how much more would it mean to us ! Countless generations have prayed at Sion-Vaudémont. But to whom ? Spontaneous religion is both vaguely universal and intensely local. The spirit of Sion-Vaudémont is not Roman Catholic. The Baillards, who yield to its influence, are slowly driven to a schism, to the creation of an autonomous sanctuary. Barrès, the nationalist, the prophet of " the soil and the dead," cannot conceal his sympathy for them. How could he defend a Church which is based on Jewish traditions, Greek theology, Roman imperialism—a Church catholic in scope, and governed by Italians ? Thorough-going Germanists have advocated a return to Odin-worship : this is the logical outcome of nationalism. Catholicism claims to rise superior to " race, surroundings,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

and time ”; to borrow Barrès’s phraseology, Catholicism is the great uprooter.

The solution of this antinomy is found in compromise. Catholicism has accepted much of the local tradition; and it has become part of the life and spirit of the place. But *The Inspired Hill* has not said its last word.

§ 2. THE DOCTRINE OF NATIONALISM IN MAURICE BARRÈS.

The “soil and the dead ”—“French truth ” and “ French justice ”—The French Norm and the French Tradition—The three roots of patriotism: common interests, common traditions, common aspirations.

We may now consider the theory defended in *The Romance of National Energy* and in *The Eastern Bastions*—the doctrine of nationalism. It were idle to deny that this doctrine is attractive, and, within certain limits, convincing. The influence of “ the soil,” as Barrès calls it, of the early and ancestral surroundings, may easily be exaggerated; but, great or small, that influence is a fact. However, such as it is, it serves as a justification for local patriotism, for provincialism, rather than for nationalism. The

MAURICE BARRÈS

best pages perhaps of Maurice Barrès have been inspired by the valley of the Moselle. That valley is half-German, half-French. A man from Metz, moulded by its landscape, its climate, its economic conditions, would naturally be akin to a man of Trèves: but "the soil" does not make him the brother of a Basque, a Breton or a Provençal. You will not have to scratch the nationalism of Barrès very deep before you find regionalism pure and simple—devotion to Lorraine rather than to France: this is visible in his anti-Southern pamphlet, *Cracks in the House*. We have no objection to regionalism: it is a legitimate and an inspiring sentiment. But patriots and cosmopolitans agree that regionalism, in case of conflict, should yield to the wider allegiance—national or universal. It is certainly not for regionalism, for the defence of the small province in which they were born, that the sons of Canada and Australasia are fighting in Flanders or in the Eastern Mediterranean. The true basis of nationalism cannot therefore be geographical: it must be cultural. And, fortunately, the culture of Maurice Barrès is not provincial.

"The Dead!" Barrès means that we should

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

follow in our fathers' footsteps. This would be easier if mankind were going back instead of forward. As it is, our fathers' footsteps have led us just where we are, and lead us no farther. Beyond, it is for us to open up a new road. Shall we say that their evolution projects itself beyond them and beyond us, traces the one line from which we cannot swerve? But this is contrary to facts. Mankind is for ever at the cross-roads. Life is infinitely varied, and our ancestors had in them all human possibilities. Some of these possibilities have developed better than others in the past: hence we have formed the conception of a certain French type, in which these characters are predominant, and which Barrès would have us take as our pattern. Why should we? Traits of minor importance in our grandfathers may become the most important of all in ourselves. An American adviser is at present telling the Chinese that it is unwise for them to change, since their tradition proves them unchangeable. But the very desire for reform evinced by some Chinamen is proof positive that Chinamen can change: and if some, why not many? When Pascal was writing his supremest *Thoughts*, should he have reminded

MAURICE BARRÈS

himself that he had better leave the subject alone, since he did not belong to a mystic race? Should the Germans of yesterday have been deterred in their efforts by the reflection: "We are metaphysicians, musicians, poets, dreamers, but not practical men: what is the use of our attempting to form a strong, united, prosperous nation?" Should an American that feels music within his heart check the impulse and say: "My heredity is against it; mine is not a musical people; therefore I must remain for ever in self-imposed tone-deafness, or be satisfied with rag-time played on a gramophone?" Monsieur Lacarelle, says Anatole France, possessed a pair of moustaches which, after determining his physiognomy, had also determined his character. He looked like an ancient Gallic chief. Now, excessive devotion to the fair sex is part and parcel of Gallic tradition. M. Lacarelle felt himself in duty bound to make love to all women. "The Soil and the Dead!"

The truth is that, individuals as well as nations, we never know what we are, we never know what we can do, until we try. We may not be able to go beyond the achievements of our ancestors. But we may be the discoverers

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of unsuspected treasures in the national soul. Of course, we must accept our limitations. We cannot hope to grow wings like birds, or add a cubit to our stature. We are without doubt determined to a very great extent by pre-existing conditions, and chiefly by early surroundings. But, just because these limitations are inevitable facts, there is no need for us to worry overmuch about them. They will assert themselves without our consent. Either the doctrine preached by Barrès, "the acceptation of a determinism," is false and dangerous, for it might deprive us of a chance of improving ourselves; or, if it is true, it is profoundly useless. Margaret Fuller said—with what New England and transcendental impressiveness we may easily imagine: "I accept the Universe." When these words were reported to Carlyle, the sage commented: "Gad! She had better." We are not called upon to accept the inevitable: our duty is to find out for ourselves what is inevitable, and what is not.

Nationalism, "the acceptation of a determinism," "obedience to our guides, the soil and the dead," is, in the mind of Barrès, not a doctrine of pride, but a doctrine of modesty. Let

MAURICE BARRÈS

us be French, and nothing but French: not because France is superior to all other nations, but because we are French, and cannot transcend our own nature. The Moselle is not the sacred Ganges, and Racine is not Shakespeare. But they are ours, and of greater things we could have but an unconvincing imitation. I do not like this excessive modesty. It may be less dangerous to the peace of the world than the assertiveness of the younger nations: but it would seem to me, if it were sincere, a sign of fatigue, of old age, of decadence. As a matter of fact, it is not even half-sincere in Barrès himself. In the other French nationalists, pride is as unbounded as among their German congeners. The doctrine of resignation: "Let us be content to be French, for if we attempt to be anything else, we are doomed to inferiority," becomes: "Let us be French, exclusively French: there is nothing better under the sun."

Like all other masterpieces, be they the work of nature or of art, French culture, in order to be fully appreciated, must be looked at from a definite point of view, whence all its elements are seen in their right perspective and with their true proportions. This exact point is what the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Barrèsians call "French Truth." Whoso fails to reach it remains an alien, a barbarian. In the same spirit, Barrès and his friends, at the time of the Dreyfus case, elaborated the theory of "French Justice." From the point of view of abstract justice, if universal principles alone were considered, Dreyfus may have been innocent. But we have outgrown the shallow cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century. From the point of view of "French Justice" (*i.e.*, Nationalism), Dreyfus was guilty. The humanitarians, the "intellectuals," the judges who reversed the verdict, were un-French, anti-French.

The fallacy is obvious. It consists in the confusion of history with ethics. If you want to understand the motives of your ancestors, it is necessary that you place yourselves, for the time being, in their position. "To understand is to forgive," said Renan. But to forgive is not to condone. Even though the historian should see fit to abdicate his right of judgment, the moralist and the political philosopher cannot do so without stultifying themselves. Our point of view, for example, is widely different from that of our medieval forefathers. Undoubtedly

MAURICE BARRÈS

Michelet's poetic sympathy is infinitely more valuable as an historical method than Voltaire's irony, so incomprehensive in its superficial cleverness. But the greatest treasures of sympathy cannot make the cosmogony of the Middle Ages tally with the facts as we know them at present. Voltaire may be disqualified as an historian: that does not prevent many of his ideas from being right in themselves—at least as far as we know. I am trying hard to understand the Prussian Junker, the Pan-Germanist Professor, the Barrèsian nationalist; I may come to "forgive" them, to admire them, possibly to like them—but agree with them?—God forbid!

What Barrès calls French *truth*, I should like to call French *aberration*. I take the term in the sense it has in optics—a purely physical cause of error. So long as it is not wilful, there is no reason why it should rouse our contempt or our indignation. Neither should we ignore it, or fail to determine it with the utmost precision. It was the great mistake of eighteenth-century philosophers to reason as though all men—including themselves—were free from such causes of error. A frankly nationalistic writer

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

is more innocuous than one who is unconsciously imbued with national prejudices. In the latter case, the aberration is much harder to detect. "Nationalism" is therefore a factor that we cannot afford to neglect in our search for truth: but it is a factor to be discounted, guarded against, and not Truth itself.

For the sake of argument, I have accepted Barrès's contention that there is a French type, a French tradition, a French truth. But this is open to question. At present, it is understood that "integral nationalism," or French truth in its fulness, implies three terms—classicism, monarchy, catholicism. This we were told dogmatically by Charles Maurras and *L'Action Française*. Paul Bourget followed suit; so did Jules Lemaître. Maurice Barrès, it must be said, is much broader than his friends. Although converted to classicism, he wants romanticism to rally the main column, "flying still its own glorious banners." He embraces in his sympathy the France of Joan of Arc, the France of Louis XIV., the France of Danton, the France of Bonaparte. At the death-bed of Jaurès, he confessed that he loved the great Internationalist whom he had so long and so bitterly com-

MAURICE BARRÈS

bated. Yet "traditionalism" would have no meaning if it did not denote a definite set of traditions. And, on the whole, Barrès accepts two terms at least of the nationalistic trinity—classicism and catholicism.*

Classicism and catholicism ! A strange conception of traditionalism that would rule out of the French tradition Voltaire and Victor Hugo ! The precarious harmony between classicism, absolute monarchy, and catholicism was attained about 1660, and preserved for less than half a century. The eighteenth century was classical, and increasingly anticatholic. The Revolution was intensely classical in taste and spirit. The Romanticists were all Catholics and Monarchists. Where is your single, harmonious, compelling tradition ?

Taine has attempted to prove that France

* Although a friend and outspoken admirer of Bourget and Maurras, he preserves towards the Royalists an attitude of "benevolent neutrality." For his religious opinions cf. *For our Churches* and *The Great Distress of the Churches in France*. He is not a Christian. Neither is Maurras. It is possible for those traditionalists to defend Catholicism without believing in God. I have known Oxford men whose faith was compounded, in equal parts, of Herbert Spencer and the Thirty-Nine Articles.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

went logic-mad in the eighteenth century. Rousseauism, the Rights of Man, were symptoms of a disease, which has nearly ruined the ancient body of the French nation. Yet, in 1315, a royal ordinance of Louis X., freeing all the serfs in the King's domains, affirmed that "according to the law of nature every man should be born free." The law of nature, liberty and equality, five centuries before the Revolution! And the bold utterances of Jehan de Meung in the *Roman de la Rose*! From the Middle Ages to the present day, in political life and in literature, there is an uninterrupted current of free-thought and democracy. I do not claim that it was at all periods, or until recent times, the main stream: but, half-hidden from sight, it went on its way. Your beautiful doctrine of "acceptation," like the kindred doctrines of resignation and obedience, resolves itself in practice to this: "My ideal is true, and the sooner you *accept* it, the better. It is true, because it is the traditional ideal of our nation." To which may be replied: "There are many strains in French tradition—rationalism and cosmopolitanism are found in it too. I do not like the particular strain that you have selected

MAURICE BARRÈS

and are attempting to impose upon us to the exclusion of all others. Even if tradition were as simple and rectilinear as you affect to believe, it would be but part of the material with which I mean to mould my destiny. Parts of that tradition I shall ignore; others will be a help; others a hindrance. The tradition that I in my turn shall hand down to my son will be different from the one I have received from my father. Else I should have lived in vain."

We believe that "the soil and the dead" form an insufficient basis for nationalism. The mere fact of cohabitation in the same territory and under the same laws—let us say in my own State, Texas—whatever may be our race, our religion, our native language, our cultural preferences, creates from the first certain practical duties, which may be grouped under the general term of *good citizenship*. These duties are not rooted in sentiment, but in necessity. Whether you love the land or not, it is your interest that order be preserved and good roads be maintained. *Tradition*—the love for our fathers' home, for their language, their faith, and even the form of their faith, for the heroes of a certain

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

history,—this is another bond of union, fully as real, fully as strong as the first, but of a totally different nature. It is a sacred sentiment, which, on account of its very sacredness, can neither be imposed nor taken away by force. An Alsatian may become a law-abiding German citizen, interested in the good government and prosperity of the nation of which his province has become a part: you cannot expect his heart to swell with pride and joy on the anniversaries of Rossbach and Sedan. This kind of traditional and cultural patriotism is a sort of religion, and should be left as free as any religion. Thus the Union does not suffer from the loyalty of the South to its own past; thus Boers and Habitants are happy under the British flag. There may be conversions from one set of traditions to another: Alsace was undoubtedly Germanic at heart long after it had become a possession of the French King; and she felt herself fully French only after she had been reborn, with the rest of France, into the modern world inaugurated by the Revolution. But such conversions should remain absolutely spontaneous. A third bond of union, nobler than cohabitation, nobler even than common traditions, is the possession of a com-

MAURICE BARRÈS

mon *Ideal*. This it is that makes Americans of us all.

But who can fail to see that the ideals of all modern nations are substantially the same, that they are converging towards one goal of fraternal justice? Nationalism, in a democracy, is but an avenue to internationalism. We love America, as the best Frenchmen love France and the best Germans love Germany, because America, France, Germany are servants of the universal ideal. To identify this ideal with special forms of culture, noble in themselves, no doubt, and worthy of our passionate devotion, is a grievous mistake. Truth is truth, whether Bacon, Descartes, or Kant expressed it. To attempt to defend or spread by force that which is essentially beyond the realm of force, is the root of the present evil. And it is because Barrès has sought to narrow down the ideal of France from the service of mankind to the cult of an incomplete and local tradition that his work, on the whole, is not good. A Lorrainer, hypnotized by the tragic memories of 1870, he has mutilated his soul. Let us hope that after this war France will abandon the bypath of Barrèsian nationalism for the high road of

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

humanitarianism, a road on which she will meet her sister, the Germany of Kant.*

* A striking instance of the "nationalistic aberration": Maurice Barrès had been one of the most fervent among the French admirers of Wagner. His name was found year after year on the registers of Bayreuth. At present, he is endorsing a demand for banishing Wagner from the French stage.

CHAPTER VII
ROMAIN ROLLAND

CHAPTER VII.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

Jean-Christophe, cyclopean and multitudinous, is now established as one of the world's classics. Our young century has produced no work that compares with it in bulk, in ambition, in breadth of culture, in wealth of sympathy. It is the life-story of a powerful personality, painfully emerging from the slime, conquering the sneering world without, taming the beast within; it is the biography of a musician—one might say the romance or the epic of Music—a huge symphony in which the praise of Music, the prophetess, the comforter, recurs as a constant *leitmotiv*; it is the portrait and testament of a generation; it is a plea for the reconciliation and harmony of the two leading "culture-nations" of continental Europe, France and Germany. Completed in 1912, it prophesied the present war, and looked beyond it. When the cataclysmic madness which now possesses our brothers east and west of the Vosges has sub-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

sided, all good Europeans will eagerly seek for instruments and materials of reconstruction; and not the least among these will be the hero and the author of that great book, Jean-Christophe and Romain Rolland.

§ 1. ROMAIN ROLLAND'S CAREER.

Rome—Music—The drama—Biographies—*Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*.

Romain Rolland is not a professional writer, still less a professional novelist. He is an historian by training, and a passionate lover of music. Born in 1868 at Clamecy in Central France, he went through that glorious "École Normale Supérieure" in Paris which, fenced round with a formidable wall of competitive examinations, boasting of an unrivalled roll of teachers and alumni, is one of the impregnable fortresses of French culture. He took his degree of "Agrégé" in history, and was then sent to the French School of Art and Archæology in Rome. There, in the most cosmopolitan of all capitals, he became a true European, at home in the language and thought of Latin and Teuton alike. He devoted himself to the study of art,

ROMAIN ROLLAND

and especially of music. His Doctor's dissertation, *The Origins of the Modern Lyrical Drama*, was the first thesis on a musical subject to be accepted by the Sorbonne. He returned to his Alma Mater, the Superior Normal School, as Lecturer in the History of Art; and a chair of musical æsthetics was later created for him at the Sorbonne. As a musical historian and critic, his work is considerable. In addition to his thesis, he wrote biographies of Handel and Beethoven; he gathered his miscellaneous articles into captivating volumes—*Musicians of Yesterday* and *Musicians of To-day*; and he contributed to a German series a study, *Paris as a Music Centre*, which, I am sure, would be a revelation to many Anglo-American readers.

When the Dreyfus crisis broke out, Romain Rolland was about thirty years old. A University man, a cosmopolitan, an idealist: his road was traced plainly enough for him; for his colleagues, almost to a man, were ardent in the cause of justice, and all Europe beyond the frontiers of France was in full sympathy with them. We are somewhat puzzled, therefore, to find Romain Rolland adopting an attitude of self-effacing neutrality. His first duty, he

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

claimed, was to save the light of intelligence, which fanatics on either side were forgetting in their quarrels. The plea is specious. That there was blindness, self-delusion, fanaticism, low passions and sordid interests among Dreyfusists as well as among anti-Dreyfusists was evident enough in the eyes even of youthful enthusiasts seventeen years ago. And the lamentable attitude of many lost leaders after the battle was won has made it clearer still that the cause of right may be defended by unworthy men. I wonder if among the angelic hosts led by Michael against Lucifer there were not a number of self-seekers who were wise enough to pick out the winning side? Yet there was a right and a wrong in the Dreyfus affair, as there is a right and a wrong in the present conflict. And whoever shirks the responsibility of taking sides is a Laodicean. Neutrality may be political wisdom and the only course open to a heterogeneous nation: but surely it is not the highest duty of the individual. Our highest duty is to hate the sin and love the sinner. Now, I do not believe that Romain Rolland was ever, in his heart, a Laodicean. No living writer has shown nobler aspirations, and he has recently

ROMAIN ROLLAND

proved himself a man of rarest courage. But his attitude during the Dreyfus case is the sign of a certain haziness of purpose which has left its mark in the pages of *Jean-Christophe*. Good will he has, enough and to spare; but *will*, clear and straight? Perhaps not quite enough to harmonize the clashing tendencies of his multifarious culture.

Of this good-will, his whole literary career is a monument. It may be said of Romain Rolland that he has never written a frivolous book, and never stooped to the confection of pot-boilers. Not only does he disdain to write for fun or for pelf—we shall see under what uncommercial conditions *Jean-Christophe* and most of his works were published—but he is almost Tolstoyan in his condemnation of art for art's sake. Authorship is truly for him a mission, an "apostolate." He wants to brush aside the artificial production of a self-styled élite—exquisite at times, but frankly decadent. He wants to reach the people, to restore the free communion that should ever exist between the primitive, collective soul of the nation, and the small company of true poets. In this, and in many aspects of his art and thought, he is indeed the disciple of our great

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

democratic historian, Michelet. During the latter part of his life, Michelet was tormented with the scruple: "What have we, scholars, men of letters, done for the people? Have we not left them spiritually unclothed, unfed?" The personal and profound influence of Tolstoy confirmed in Romain Rolland this feeling of brotherly responsibility. He has tried to feed the people.

His first attempt was through the drama. A great admirer of Shakespeare, Romain Rolland had first the ambition of reforming the French stage. The drama is the social form of art *par excellence*. A strong, healthy, inspiring national drama is one of the greatest assets that a people can possess. Rolland dreams of something utterly different from the glittering cynicism of the society comedy, from the morbidity and sophistication of the problem play, from the childish clinking and clanging of the Romantic melodrama, from the frozen oratory of the classics—something simple, human, elemental, collective, a play merging into a pageant, in which a whole populace could be both spectators and actors. A beautiful dream indeed: it seems to combine the best features of the Greek theatre, of the Passion Play, and of those patriotic festivals

ROMAIN ROLLAND

in which the Swiss are past-masters. Our own Percy McKaye has conceived a similar ideal—a civic drama, ritual and pageant, in which he sees a school of citizenship and even—God save the mark!—a substitute for the pomp and glory of war. It is easy enough for an *agrégé* and Sorbonne professor to clamour: "Let us be popular, let us be spontaneous!" But, from preaching to practice there is an abyss. Romain Rolland has written a number of plays, of which six only have been gathered in his two volumes, *The Tragedies of Faith* and *The Drama of the Revolution*. The latter alone, with its patriotic humanitarianism à la Michelet, might fulfil the author's ambitious programme. *The Wolves* is a transposition of the Dreyfus case to a city in which a Republican army is besieged: a close-knit, tense, breathless drama of great simplicity and power, but of no popular appeal. The other two, *Danton* and especially *The Fourteenth of July*, come nearer the ideal of a popular play. Yet, somehow, they fail of their object. Here, as later in *Jean-Christophe*, we see a man who feels—or wishes to feel—like a Prometheus, but writes like a professor. It is excellent literature; but, alas, it is literature.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Romain Rolland made an apostolic effort in another direction. Abstract ideas, he thinks, may command the enthusiasm of a few: but the mass must have heroes to worship. It may seem unduly paradoxical to challenge a statement, which, in many minds, has the strength of an axiom: but I have seen crowds swayed by an anonymous dream of social upheaval, knowing all the while that their actual leaders were mediocre men. The soldiers of the Revolution performed more wonderful feats from 1792 to 1795 than the fanaticized prætorians of Napoleon. Romain Rolland, taking for granted that propensity to hero-worship, wants, in his own terms, "to purify our atmosphere with the breath of the heroes." Well-selected biographies could be to the modern man what the Golden Legend was to the Middle Ages, or Plutarch to the classical period. So he wrote the lives of Michael-Angelo, Beethoven, Tolstoy. But although he was an evangelist rather than an historian, he was too good a scholar and too scrupulous a man to tell edifying lies. Strength, joy, love: we find in Michael-Angelo, in Beethoven, in Tolstoy, the trinity of great human virtues, contrasted or blending: but also what

ROMAIN ROLLAND

abysses of weakness, folly, and despair ! The impression left upon us by the biography of Michael-Angelo, in particular, is melancholy to a degree. This Titan of Art struggled eternally against petty annoyances, mostly of his own making; this master of the brush, the chisel and the pen bungled his own existence. Little more cheer can be expected from the lives of Beethoven and Tolstoy, both so strangely sad at the close. No demigods were they, but suffering and wandering men. We love them all the more for their frailties and their sorrows; all the more also do we love the sensitive, sympathetic soul of their biographer; but as a tonic to the people, these books are worthless.

Romain Rolland was thus no mere beginner when he undertook his *Jean-Christophe*. But his name was known of very few, and even these thought of him as distinguished rather than great. *Jean-Christophe* first appeared in the collection known as *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (*The Notebooks of the Fortnight*); and, as the circumstances of its publication, the special public for which it was meant, affected the character of the work, we must dwell for a moment on those curious *Cahiers*. They, as well as a

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

weekly filled with the same spirit, *Pages Libres*, were founded at the time of the Dreyfus case by a number of young men who, by birth or by education, belonged to the upper middle class. These young men had seen the danger of blind prejudices—be they revolutionary or reactionary. The one thing needful, in their opinion, was a body of conscious citizens, free and strong, who could think for themselves and act for themselves. With dilettantism and anarchism, the earnest founders of the *Notebooks* had no sympathy; neither did they want blindly to enrol themselves in any sect or party. Democrats in the widest sense of the term, they had no desire to worship Demos any more than Plutus. They were feeling their way, eager to work, and not unwilling to fight. There were among them Catholics like their leader, Péguy, Protestants like Charles Guyiesse, the founder of *Pages Libres*, Jews like Daniel Halévy. The subscribers were mostly professional men, with a clear majority of teachers and a fair sprinkling of artists. Between the staff, the contributors, and the readers, there prevailed a personal feeling of confidence, and almost of affection: they all formed indeed a co-operative society for

ROMAIN ROLLAND

the exchange and elaboration of ideas. The *Cahiers*, although periodical, were not strictly in magazine form: each number was filled by a single contributor. It might contain a poem, a drama, a short novel, an historical, artistic, or political study. It was for this public that Romain Rolland wrote the seventeen instalments—now published in ten volumes—of his *Jean-Christophe*. It may be doubted whether the first part of his work—the childhood and adolescence of his hero—would have been accepted by any commercial publisher. In our opinion, it is the best of all: but, slow-moving, and placed in an unfamiliar setting, it might well have puzzled the general public and the common run of critics. Had the *Cahiers* done nothing but render the publication of *Jean-Christophe* possible, they would deserve a place in the history of contemporary letters. But this is only their most striking service. They have brought out many a young man with an ideal that “would not pay.” They have given him the joy of seeing his prose or his verse in print, and the keener joy of knowing that a select, sympathetic public—some two thousand, all told—were ready to give him a fair trial. I am

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

thinking at present of such men as Albert Thierry, one of the sweetest souls and keenest intellects it has ever been my privilege to know, with the rarest gifts of philosophical insight and poetical expression, a lover of Germany like Romain Rolland himself, shot dead in the defence of the European commonwealth. Péguy, the founder and manager, a man with exasperating tricks of style and twists of thought, yet instinct with life, and just coming into full possession of his talent, was also killed in the present war—who knows?—by some Thierry, Péguy, or Romain Rolland from over the Rhine. The *Cahiers* are now a memory: but for Parisians of my generation they remain bound up with the best of our young hopes.

Jean-Christophe, although written primarily for such a small, definite public, does not belong to esoteric literature: the *Cahiers* as a whole have eschewed the danger which threatens most of the uncommercial reviews started by young men. They remained broadly human, and *Jean-Christophe* has achieved popular success in several languages. Yet there are a number of allusions to literary and artistic cliques that can hardly be understood except

ROMAIN ROLLAND

by the initiated; and we find throughout the book echoes of conversations which must have taken place in the editor's office. Allusions and echoes will soon be forgotten; and the mighty biographical romance will be none the poorer for their loss.

§ 2. "JEAN-CHRISTOPHE": THE FIRST FOUR VOLUMES.

Dawn—Morning—Adolescence—Rebellion.

Jean-Christophe is a novel of a type rare in France: it takes the hero from infancy to old age. There is no unity of plot: Heaven thanks!—no "secret," no substitution of children, no hidden testament are needed to connect these ten volumes. The one link between the episodes is the personality of Jean-Christophe.

Jean-Christophe Krafft was born in a small grand-ducal capital, on the Rhine, not far from the place where the great river abandons the hill region for the immense Northern plain. The city is composite and symbolical, like the university town in which Mr. Bergeret spent so many dreary years. It resembles Bonn more closely than any other. Bonn was the residence of Beethoven, and Beethoven was undoubtedly

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

the first model that Romain Rolland had in mind. Like that of Beethoven, the family of Jean-Christophe came from the Netherlands. His grandfather Jean-Michel had become *Kapellmeister* to the Grand-Duke. A curious character, Grandfather Jean-Michel: a lover of music, and a good director, but an indifferent performer; filled with the ambition of composing, but devoid of inspiration; tall, stout, loud, a great eater and a heavy drinker, an indefatigable worker, even in old age; given to violent fits of passion; possessed of a great sense of duty and personal dignity, and rather fond of expressing exalted sentiments. But with all his ambition, his physical strength, his violence and his pompous platitudes, he is at heart singularly timid, cringing before the local aristocracy. A chaotic, but convincing and not unlovable personality: an incomplete man of genius, compounded with a Philistine of the *Biedermeierzeit*, and even with a flunkey.

His son, Melchior, is worse. Big and strong like Jean-Michel, and handsome to boot, he is a virtuoso on the violin: he has those powers of expression that his father lacked: but he has nothing to say. He is devoid of sense and of

ROMAIN ROLLAND

energy. He marries Louisa, a cook, kind, humble, insignificant, with flaxen hair and sheepish face. Why, no one ever knew—Louisa and Melchior least of all. He torments her eternally for what he considers a *mésalliance*. He gets more and more addicted to alcohol in order to veil from himself the consciousness of his abject failure.

On an old piano given by Grandfather, Jean-Christophe picks out chords that move him deliciously, and stir the very depths of his soul. His father catches him idling at the keyboard; the boy expects a whipping; but Melchior has been struck with the magnificent plan of exploiting his son as an infant prodigy. Jean-Christophe does not take to musical drill as to his free voyages of adventure into the fairyland of harmony. He refuses to learn, and has to be beaten black and blue before he yields. Finally, technique is cudgelled into him. His little tunes are noted down by Grandfather, and dedicated, in terms of due servility, to His Most Serene Highness. A public concert is arranged, and the boy appears on the platform, uncomfortable, ridiculous, and touching, in an evening suit, and with hair curled like lamb's fleece.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

The concert is a great ordeal; it ends with a nervous outbreak and a storm of tears. But the Grand-Duke and the public are pleased: Jean-Christophe is now, irrevocably, the slave of music.

Amid such surroundings—for the Kraffts live in increasing squalor—with such weak and inconsistent masters as Michel and Melchior, with the atmosphere of sleepy Philistinism of the little city, and a Philistine on the grand-ducal throne, Jean-Christophe would have little chance of developing a genuine artistic temperament. He is saved by an angel in humble guise: Uncle Gottfried, Louisa's brother, timid, kindly, humble like herself. Gottfried is a pedlar with the soul of a Saint Francis—or shall we say of a Tolstoy? He sings to the boy folk-songs, spontaneous, immemorial, that fit his moods and reach his very soul; and gentle though he be, he condemns the musical efforts of Christophe—those pretty tunes that mean nothing, inspired by the sole desire of vulgar praise. He calls them bluntly “lies.” Thus Christophe begins to feel the difference between music, the most pretentious and expensive of noises, and music, the ethereal expression of the inmost heart.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

With the public concert ends the first volume, called *The Dawn*. The second, *Morning*, takes Jean-Christophe from six to fifteen. Jean-Michel dies. With him disappears the last authority that could control the degrading passion of Melchior. After horrible scenes, Jean-Christophe, still a very young child, has to consider himself as the responsible head of the family: his father's salary as well as his own, as court musicians, are paid into his hands. Hard, sombre years for the boy: his athletic constitution can hardly bear the strain: he suffers from constant nervous ailments. He is coarse in appearance, vulgar in manners, unkempt, ugly: but illumined by his faith in music and in himself.

On the Rhine boat, he meets a boy of his own age, Otto Diener, who has heard him perform and admires him immensely. The pair strike on the spot a romantic friendship: the sap of adolescence is ascending in their veins. They are absurd in their effusions, and never quite sincere: for they attempt to keep their relationship on the exalted plane which it had reached but for a moment. They are never free and happy except when, forgetting their Damon and

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Pythias attitudes, they romp about like the young boys they are. But the idyll does not last. Otto is rich, well-groomed, well-mannered, timid, respectful, respectable: he has the soul of a perfect Philistine. He is somewhat ashamed of Jean-Christophe, with his Bohemianism, his revolutionary disrespect, his plebeian loudness. Sure of Christophe's devotion, he takes a coquette's pleasure in tormenting him, in rousing his jealousy, for the mere devilry of it. Christophe's brothers, who have grown into nasty little scamps, do their best to spoil their friendship with their sneers and innuendoes. It is a relief when Otto leaves the city for some distant university.

Jean-Christophe's boyish enthusiasm for his friend Otto was but the herald of love. An aristocratic widow, Madame Josepha von Kerich, comes to settle down in her long abandoned provincial home, not far from the house of Jean-Christophe's parents. She has a daughter, Minna, a little goose, rather pretty, and instinctively flirtatious. Mme. von Kerich is level-headed, kindly in her manners, elegantly selfish at heart. She "picks up" Jean-Christophe, because she does not know what to do in her new

ROMAIN ROLLAND

surroundings, because she sincerely admires his courage, because he is talked of as a musical genius, and chiefly perhaps because his absurd manifestations of adoration and gratitude amuse and flatter her. As for Minna, she despises Christophe, who is a boor; and he, on his part, does not waste much admiration on her. Yet, one day, when he is giving her a music lesson, some obscure instinct prompts him to kiss the little paw which happens to be conveniently near his lips. And this kiss is an electric spark between two beings who have absolutely nothing in common, except that they have both reached the April of their lives. Then follows an innocent idyll, in which the two children try hard to believe that they are madly in love. As a matter of fact, they are in love with Love, or rather with the shadow of its coming. Mme. von Kerich is too experienced a woman of the world not to discover the great secret of Minna and Christophe. Without any fuss, she moves for a while to Frankfort. Minna's letters soon grow shorter and more formal. When she comes back, Christophe discovers what abysses lie between them—social and spiritual gulfs. Minna is lost, or rather she never was won. His

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

wounded pride flares up into burning fury. But the scar will soon be healed. And his silly little love affair is forgotten in the tragedy of his father's death: Melchior, drunk, has fallen into the mill race, and they bring home his drowned body. Thus ends the childhood of Jean-Christophe.

The Kraffts, after Melchior's death, have been compelled to take humbler lodgings in the house of the Eulers. These good people, honest, sympathetic, are a relief at first, after the deceitful politeness, the hardness and coldness of the von Kerich. But they soon become unbearable. All of them are vulgar, loud, pessimistic, and constantly interfering with people's most private affairs. They have an assertive and uncompromising sense of duty, which consists mainly in making themselves and everybody else as uncomfortable as possible. The female head of the house, Amalia, shrieking and dictatorial, is insufferable. Her daughter Rosa, a plain and rather foolish little girl, is loud like the rest, but kind and affectionate. The poor child falls deeply in love with Jean-Christophe, who cannot bear her.

Meanwhile adolescence is throbbing with the

ROMAIN ROLLAND

rich, heavy blood of Christophe. His thoughts are turbid to the verge of madness. He has a strong animal nature that he has not yet curbed, that he does not even understand. Not until many years later will the brute be lashed into submission.

Yet his next experience is singularly pure and sweet. There lives on the ground-floor of the Eulers' house a young widow, Sabine, who keeps a little store of notions. The description of Sabine's character is, in my opinion, the most wonderful thing in the whole cycle. We know practically nothing about her, except that she is languid in body and torpid in mind, too lazy even to dress with care or to attend properly to her little shop, too lazy to read, to speak, and perhaps to think. We are not even told that she is very pretty: she is slight of build, with grey, indefinite eyes. Yet, with Jean-Christophe, we fall under her undefinable charm. After the squalor of so many episodes, after the mediocrity of Otto, the artificial elegance of the Kerich, the vulgarity of the Euler, Sabine represents simplicity, sweetness, repose. She is not much more substantial than a shadow, and the melancholy of fragile gentleness is upon her.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Christophe and Sabine spend sweet evening hours of silent communion, seated in front of the house. No word of love passes between them. Yet they know. They are invited together to a christening. A storm compels them to accept for the night the hospitality of Sabine's brother. A door between their adjoining rooms unbolted, then bolted again in silence, is the symbol of their love, which was to remain unspoken and chaste. Christophe goes away for a series of concerts. When he returns, Sabine is dead. A picture in grey upon grey, exquisitely tender and pathetic without a single touch of sentimentality. The haunting eyes of Sabine impress themselves indelibly in our memory.

Then comes the fall, deferred by Sabine's sweet influence. Jean-Christophe meets a shop-girl, Ada, vulgar and sensual, stupid and yet perverse. The boy sinks lower and lower, in company with Ada's friends and with his own brother, Ernst. But his teachers go too far and too fast for him: he shakes them off with a shudder of disgust. He is not saved yet: the old *Erbfeind*, the hereditary foe, drink, is upon him. Is he going to be another Melchior? The angel in disguise, Uncle Gottfried, saves him.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

The great untutored strength is still there, the flame of idealism is still bright, and Jean-Christophe sets forth to conquer the world.

But the first result of this great awakening is to make him conscious of the conventional lies that surround, and had all but stifled, him: the hypocrisy of national idealism, the self-delusion of much of our culture, the hollow mask that we worship as art. The fierce sincerity of a boy easily becomes iconoclastic: the whole Germanic Pantheon seems to him an array of crumbling idols. He blasphemes not only Brahms and Mendelssohn, not only Schubert and Schumann, but Wagner and Beethoven themselves. Unfortunately, he is inveigled into writing his destructive criticism for a little review, published by a set of gilded young æsthetes, mostly Jews; and he draws upon himself the hostility of the whole town. An article of his, published in the local Socialist paper, causes him to lose his last shield, the protection of the Grand-Duke. He spends his last pfennig on an edition of his *Lieder*, which does not sell. He loses his private lessons. His friendships are poisoned by insidious scandal. To keep body and soul together, he must teach stupid children in a private school,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

or rather make believe that he is teaching them. A symphony orchestra offers to perform one of his compositions; at the public rehearsal, they grotesquely disfigure it, amid the jeers and laughter of the audience: and the *Kapellmeister* closes the "execution" with these avenging words: "I would never have had that thing played to the end, had I not wanted to expose the individual who had so foolishly attacked Meister Brahms." Christophe feels himself engulfed by the quicksands. One last effort: he scrapes a few marks together, and goes to Berlin to see Hassler, the great musician whom he worshipped as a boy and who had promised to help him. He can barely secure a hearing. Hassler is moved for a moment by the new and powerful elements in Christophe's music, but his laziness, his selfishness, his cynicism soon take the upper hand, and he dismisses the young man with discouraging words.*

On his way back from Berlin, however, Christophe has a few hours of pure joy. One man at

* These different episodes, the Calvary of a musician, are borrowed from the life of Hugo Wolf, who, not blessed with Christophe's power of resistance, succumbed to those persecutions and died in an insane asylum.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

least has read and appreciated his *Lieder*; a Professor-Emeritus in a Southern university, Dr. Peter Schultz. Christophe goes out of his way to visit his admirer. Old Schultz is one of the most delightful characters in contemporary literature: not great, but modest, child-like, loving, devoted to the ideal. He falls in love with Christophe's boisterous personality, as he had fallen in love with his unconventional music. Schultz is left exhausted with the joy and exertion of Christophe's visit. The old man, who had long been ailing, dies a few weeks later. Strength goes to the strong: Christophe had killed Schultz and drawn comfort from him.

He can no longer breathe in the hostile atmosphere of his little city. France, of which he has but a blurred and distorted image in his mind, attracts him mysteriously. Yet he cannot make up his mind to go, for his old mother needs him. Fate cuts the Gordian knot. At a village dance, some soldiers handle roughly the peasant girls—their rustic knights looking upon the scene in sullen impotence. Hot-headed Christophe starts a brawl. Stirred by his example, the peasants, men and women, fall upon the soldiers, several of whom are dangerously wounded. There is

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

nothing for Christophe to do but flee the country. The next morning, he is across the Belgian frontier, on his way to Paris.

§ 3. "JEAN-CHRISTOPHE": THE LAST SIX VOLUMES.

*The Fair on the Market-Place—Antoinette—In the House—
The Friends—The Burning Bush—The New Day.*

We have analyzed at some length the first four volumes, *Dawn, Morning, Adolescence, Rebellion*, because they alone possess genuine unity and continuity. There is no episode which does not contribute to the formation of Christophe's character. German life is described, not directly and for its own sake, but by implication, and as the background of the hero's personality. At the end of these four volumes, we see and feel Jean-Christophe, a tumultuous force, a demigod and a beast, still uncouth, yet compellingly alive, like some block rough-hewn by Michael-Angelo or Rodin. The other six volumes are not inferior, but they are different. The biography turns into an encyclopædia. A total picture of French, and even of European, civilization; the faults and aspirations of the present generation;

ROMAIN ROLLAND

a crowd of characters in all reaches of society; satires, sermons, and symbols: all these elements are crammed into the last two parts of the work, *Jean-Christophe in Paris* and *The End of the Journey*. We lose sight of Christophe for whole chapters at a time, and even for an entire volume. The chronology of his life becomes impossible: historical events are compressed or distended so as to fit the larger purposes of the author, and, at the end, we doubt whether Christophe himself is a living man, or a Protean symbol of Music, of the German spirit, of Strength, of his Age—the Saint Christopher who carries across the flood the all but crushing burden of the Divine Child, of the Christ that is to be. From the point of view of technique, these last six volumes cannot compare with the first four: but in their immense cycle we find treasures of realism, of psychology, of poetry and wisdom.

Jean-Christophe's first experiences in Paris are dismal enough. Hunger, isolation, humiliation, no trial is spared him. He lives, precariously, by giving lessons and doing some hackwork for musical publishers. Clumsy, uncompromising, with fits of uncontrollable violence, he gathers unto himself a goodly company

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of enemies. These succeed in wrecking his lyrical poem, "David," when, after many tribulations, he had at last managed to have it performed. He loses his temper before the hostility and incomprehension of the public, stops in the middle of a piece, plays with one finger a Mother Goose song, and tells his audience: "That is the stuff you are fit for!" Not only is he penniless, friendless, unrecognized: but he feels oppressed, sick to his very soul in the decadent Cosmopolis of which he sees naught but the worst aspects. A German Jew, Sylvain Kohn, has, under the name of Hamilton, become one of the arbiters of so-called Parisian elegance. He is the Vergil of Jean-Christophe through the circles of the new Inferno. Everywhere artificiality, frivolity, corruption. Is that Paris? Is that France? wonders the young musician. "*We are Paris; we are France,*" replies his Anglo-Judæo-Germanic guide. Everything seems to Christophe meretricious, tawdry, noisy and sordid, like the cheap and temporary versions of Coney Island that used to dishonour the streets of Paris. It is, to use the author's own phrase and the title of his fifth volume, *The Fair on the Market-Place*.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Finally, when even his robust constitution and his faith seemed to give way under the strain, he meets a young poet, gentle, timid, and a passionate admirer of his music; their souls rush towards each other; the friendship with Olivier Jeannin will be the most decisive and the most permanent factor in the progress of Christophe.

Olivier and Christophe were not absolute strangers when they met for the first time; for Christophe had come across Olivier's sister, Antoinette, just once and by the merest accident, in Germany. That single meeting had sown the seed of what might have become a great love. The father of Antoinette and Olivier, a banker, honest but incompetent, had lost some of the money entrusted to him, and, in his despair, gambled away the rest. On the eve of detection, he committed suicide. Their mother, unable to cope with the difficulties of their new life, died of heart failure. Antoinette, hitherto a merry, thoughtless young girl, devotes all her energies to the education of her timid and delicate brother. By dint of untold privations, she sees him at last safe into the Superior Normal School, and, exhausted, passes away at twenty-five.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

This simple, heart-rending story, complete in itself, and with which Christophe is but accidentally connected, fills the whole of the sixth volume.

Christophe and Olivier live together and work together. Thanks to the young poet—a scion of the old provincial bourgeoisie—the German musician discovers real France. He is no longer “on the Market-Place,” he is “in the House.” There he comes across a surprising number of excellent people, Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Free-Thinkers, priest, scholar, soldier, artisan, all quiet, retiring, shrinking, as different as one could dream from the cosmopolitan mountebanks of the Fair. Their besetting sins are that nervous pride, that self-distrust which prevent them, the sane and wholesome part of the nation, from coming together, and sweeping away the parasites. In that symbolical House—a cross-section of French society—Christophe himself is a symbol rather than the flesh and blood individual we had come to know so well. He is the spirit of health, and strength, and joy. Gradually he rouses his neighbours, humanizes them, reconciles them. Wherever his music or his laughter are heard, gloom and diffidence recede.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Then begins the third series, *The End of the Journey*. Through the fancy of an autocratic newspaper proprietor, Christophe finds himself suddenly and noisily famous, but, unbending as usual, he soon quarrels with his protector, and bitter attacks are the ransom of his season of notoriety. Then these attacks cease, without any apparent reason, as they had begun: Christophe's guardian angel has come to the rescue. That angel is Countess Bereny, now prominent in diplomatic society, and who, eight years before, a timid Italian girl of fourteen, had silently worshipped the musician: This, and other feminine friendships, justify the title of the eighth volume, *Les Amies*. But the chief interest is not centred in Christophe at all; it is found in the love marriage of Olivier Jeannin with Jacqueline, soon spoilt by the latter's frivolity and selfishness, and ending in disaster.

Olivier seeks comfort in comforting others. An accident reveals to him the unsuspected abysses of the social problem, and he can no longer take his eyes away. He follows with ardent sympathy, yet as an outsider, the syndicalist movement. Christophe, who does not share his opinions, but who is of plebeian origin,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

is much more at home with men of the people than the overrefined Olivier: he is more and more considered as one of the party. A high official in the police, who is also a lover of music, sends him indirect warnings, which pass unheeded. The First of May arrives. A great labour demonstration has been planned. Christophe enjoys the fun and excitement of it, and drags Olivier with him into the street. Suddenly, in a scuffle, a little protégé of Olivier's falls down and is in danger of being trampled to death. Olivier rushes forward to save him. Christophe, without knowing exactly what is taking place, finds himself fighting with two policemen. Threatened with a bayonet thrust, he twists his opponent's wrist, and kills him with his own weapon. There is no hope for him but in instant flight. An automobile enables him to catch the Swiss express at a way station. After a few days of aimless and dangerous wanderings, he lands, exhausted, sick, maddened with grief and remorse, in an unnamed city which can be none other than Basel. He has learnt on the way that Olivier was dead.

At Basel, he accepts the hospitality of an old acquaintance, Dr. Braun. The wife of his host,

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Anna, possesses a singularly unattractive personality. Austere but tasteless in her apparel, stiff in manners, sullen, almost hostile in expression, she repels our spontaneous and all too human Christophe. Yet, once, she sings for him with a new voice and a new soul; another time, in a short excursion, he detects in her a richness of physical life, a supple grace and strength that he had never suspected. There is a repressed Bacchant in that rigid Protestant housewife. And the same torrent of passion suddenly sweeps over Christophe and Anna. Do they love or hate each other? They do not even know each other: they no longer know themselves. Ancestral depths, long dormant, are stirred within them. They find no joy in their sin: naught but shame and remorse. They fain would die: but the old revolver they try to use misses fire. Finally Anna falls sick, and Christophe runs away. This crisis was the deepest experience in his life. His great weakness so far had been his pride in his all-conquering will: he was the captain of his soul! And now he had fallen again, as when Ada had tempted him, fallen lower than ever before, betrayed his host, whilst the sacred memory of

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

Olivier was still flesh in his soul ! He emerges from the ordeal chastened, and his hair sprinkled with grey. He had seen God in the burning bush.

Lengthening shadows cast their sombre peace over the last volume. Banished from France and Germany alike, Christophe spends ten years in Switzerland and Italy. There he meets Countess Grazia Bereny, the woman who adored him in her young girlhood and protected him secretly in Paris. She is now a widow, and the most tender, confidential friendship is established between her and Christophe. Yet they do not marry : Grazia's son, a jealous, selfish bundle of nerves, vetoes such a union. Beside, they are too different, too strongly individualized, ever to merge their personalities. Grazia dies. Christophe finds his last joy in bringing together Olivier's son and Grazia's daughter. It is his *Nunc Dimittis*. Hardly have the young people left for their bridal trip, when the old fighter collapses and dies, alone, conducting a dream symphony which merges into the music of eternity.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

§ 4. " JEAN-CHRISTOPHE " : INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM.

Strength and its failure—The techniques of *Jean-Christophe*
—*Jean Christophe* as an historical document—Franco-
German reconciliation.

Not a very happy life after all: indeed a decided failure. Material rewards Christophe had none: to the last, world-famous though he was, he had to contend with petty cares. Success gave him no pleasure: its cost was too great, and the loudest of his admirers were also the least intelligent. Three times had true love come across his path: Sabine and Antoinette died, their secret unspoken, and he met Grazia too late. His spiritual ascent had been so slow, so painful! And he did not achieve victory until he was a broken reed, unable to take any pride or joy in the weary peace that had come to him.

The chief characteristic of Jean-Christophe is Strength; the very name, Krafft, is symbolical; and the lesson of the book is perhaps just that failure of mere strength, the victory of gentleness—the faint irresistible grace of Sabine, the holy influence of Gottfried, the loving humility

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

of Schultz, the sweet dignity of Antoinette, the quiet joy and peace that were Grazia. It must be said that the strength of Jean-Christophe is not absolutely convincing. We hear much about it: we do not *feel* it so plainly. This is not strictly the author's fault. All the greatness of Jean-Christophe is in his music: unless we know his works, we know but the lesser half of him. And how can a novelist impress upon us the beauty of music—and of fictitious music at that? Even in his *Life of Beethoven*, Romain Rolland emphasized human weaknesses and trials at the expense of musical triumph. We can restore the balance, because we know what Beethoven has achieved. But what do "Judith," "David," "Gargantua," and the other titles of Christophe's works, mean to us?

There is another reason for this failure to convey the sensation of strength. Romain Rolland is intellectually a worshipper of power: at times we might be tempted to say: even of brute force. It is hard for an idealist to live in these days of Anglo-Saxon supremacy and Pan-Germanism, and not be contaminated. But he worships strength all the more because strength is not in him. His soul and his art are

ROMAIN ROLLAND

gentle and subtle, rich in half-tints, fine shades and scruples. When he describes strength, when he attempts to blow the heroic trumpet, he reminds us of the late imitators of Michael-Angelo, with the muscles of their athletes bulging to monstrous proportions—well-padded lay figures rather than living men. In passages of delicate melancholy, on the contrary, he is supreme: I earnestly believe that the episodal characters of Sabine, Schultz, Antoinette, Madame Arnaud, deserve to live in the world's literature.

As a novel, *Jean-Christophe* cannot be judged as a whole. The first four volumes form an excellent biography of the Anglo-German type, slow but continuous. In the jungle of the last six, there are several self-contained stories which are, on the contrary, masterpieces of French technique: Antoinette, Jacqueline, Anna. *Jean-Christophe* is a cycle, not a book. But in this apparent chaos, the French love of order asserts itself, sometimes to excess. Even the first part does not flow evenly: it is divided into definite, well-centred episodes. We do not take up Minna until we are absolutely through with Otto. There is no blending of the successive

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

pictures. Keller's *Grüne Heinrich*, for example, is a mighty river, like "Vater Rhein": *Jean-Christophe* might be likened to a semi-artificial waterway, interrupted by locks. In the second part, that analytical, clarifying tendency is even more strongly marked, and becomes almost painful. In *The Fair on the Market-Place*, we see all the dark stains of Paris; we must wait for the seventh volume, *In the House*, to be shown the redeeming features; no decent Frenchman, we must believe, ever ventures on the market-place; not a single self-seeker has found his way to that Haven of Blessedness, the "House." Now, Jean-Christophe was a sane, normal man; he came to Paris with Gallophile prejudices; and it is hardly expected that he would get such an artificially contrasted view of Parisian society.

As a description of French civilization, *Jean-Christophe* is a precious document, but not fully reliable. We may note in passing that the culture study and the biography of the hero, instead of being the warp and woof of the same texture, are independent, and somewhat clumsily tagged to each other. The life of Jean-Christophe and the facts of contemporary history do not synchronize. The background of the fifth

ROMAIN ROLLAND

volume is provided by the events of 1908-09: Jean-Christophe, who has just escaped from Germany before serving his time in the army, must be about twenty. In the eighth, Christophe is ten years older, but we are still in 1910 or thereabouts. In the last, fifteen more years have elapsed, yet the historical setting is the year 1911. The book is a satire and an apology in succession, rather than a disinterested study. The author attempts to be impartial: a noble desire! But his impartiality is not of the kind that proceeds from an independent and loftier conception: it consists in espousing one opinion after the other. Romain Rolland is by turns a cosmopolitan and a narrow nationalist, a defender of tradition and a believer in revolution, an admirer and an enemy of the Jews. His one positive call to arms seems to be: Let the good people come together and drive the rascals away! By *good people*, apparently, we must understand those who so far have been too weak to speak for themselves, and too selfish to help one another. Drive the rascals away! By all means. But will that reconcile Calvin, Bossuet and Voltaire? A more definite criterion Romain Rolland would probably repudiate as sectarian:

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

but I am afraid that his broad-mindedness has betrayed him into incoherence.

In a word, Romain Rolland seems to me to have the noblest ambition, the widest culture, the most varied talent of any living French writer. But the undefinable something which is in Hugo, in Balzac, in Tolstoy, even in lesser men like Loti and Barrès, is not in him. Hence a general impression of disappointment at the end—a disappointment more creditable to the author than many words of praise. *Jean-Christophe* is so great and so good that we should like it to be one of the world's everlasting masterpieces: but we cannot delude ourselves into the belief that it is.

With its deficiencies and its actual faults, there are few modern books that are more enjoyable and more ennobling. The quality which endears it most to the hearts of many readers throughout the world is its Tolstoyan depth of sympathy. But it has a more special message to impart, a message to which the events of the last two years have given a tragic significance—the reconciliation between France and Germany. And I should like to close with words that ought to be taught from Koenigsberg to Bayonne,

ROMAIN ROLLAND

words to which Romain Rolland has remained nobly loyal, even at the worst of the universal storm:

“ Who knows, in France, the force of sympathy which urges towards France so many generous hearts in the neighbouring nation? So many loyal hands stretched out towards us, and which are not responsible for the crimes of politics! And do you not see us either, you our German brothers, to whom we say: ‘ Here are our hands. In spite of lies and hatreds, we cannot be separated. We need you, you need us, for the greatness of our spirits and of our races. We are the two wings of the West. Break one, and the flight of the other will be broken. War may come: but it will not unclasp our hands, nor sever the fraternal flight of our souls.’ ”

POSTSCRIPT: “ ABOVE THE STRIFE ”

(Au-dessus de la Mêlée).

This study was completed before I had read all the articles now collected under the title “ Above the Strife.” My respect and sympathy had gone out, spontaneously, to Romain Rolland,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

one of the few men who dared to think for themselves, and express their thought, whilst poets, scientists, and philosophers allowed themselves to be swayed by the most obvious currents of mob-psychology. With his essential contention, I agree with all my heart. Western Europe is one commonwealth, now torn asunder by civil strife; and the French of to-day should not take back the tribute of admiration and love that Victor Hugo, Michelet, Quinet, Renan, have paid to the soul of Germany—*Germania Mater*. We must look beyond the conflict, and prepare, in time of war, for the collaboration and reconciliation which must, inevitably, follow, if Europe is to live and prosper. Generosity, courage, eloquence are abundantly found in these articles of Romain Rolland. Why is it that the book leaves us with an impression of uncertainty, of disappointment, almost of irritation?

First of all, the book is lacking in humility; there is in it a tinge of cultured Pharisaism: "I thank Thee, O Lord, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Now the assumption of superiority by a non-combatant is an insult

ROMAIN ROLLAND

to the brave men who are dying for their faith.* The man who stands aloof in these tragic days owes the world an explanation, almost an apology. Even a saint cannot place himself "above" the strife—he may at best remain aside and try to look beyond. The proper frame of mind for a man whose convictions keep him away from either camp is not pride, but torturing anguish, despair at his own impotence, envy for those whose faith can shine forth in deeds.

To fight may be noble, if the cause be just; not to fight may be nobler still, if abstention be dictated by principle. A consistent Christian, a Quaker, a Tolstoyan, a Dukhobor; a thorough-going internationalist and humanitarian, and even a radical individualist may stand aside, and preserve their self-respect. But what is Romain Rolland? An admirer of Tolstoy rather than a Tolstoyan; an epicure of cosmopolitanism rather than an internationalist; in all things, an eclecticist, not a believer. He could not repeat, full-heartedly, the words of William Lloyd Garrison: "My country is the

* In the same way, the unhappy phrase: "Too proud to fight," was keenly resented.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

world, my countrymen are all mankind !” His country is the world of art, his countrymen the élite of culture. His appeals, throughout this book, are not broadly human : they are addressed to the chosen few, the *Uebermenschen* of intellectual Europe.

Great is art, and holy; yet art is but the flower of life, and the mighty souls of nations are now fighting for very life. If you stand aside, let it be in the name of something wider and deeper than national life: but not in the name of Art, noble though that may be in time of peace. Nothing is so striking as the contrast between the attitudes of Romain Rolland and Maurice Barrès in presence of German vandalism: “I have been reprovèd,” writes Rolland, “for protesting more vehemently against the destruction of masterpieces than against the holocaust of human lives, but over those lives which pass away, there passes, borne on their shoulders, the sacred Ark of the art and thought of centuries. The bearers may change: let the Ark be saved ! To the élite of the world its care is entrusted. And since the common treasure is threatened, let that élite rise to protect it !”

Maurice Barrès, the traditionalist, the de-

ROMAIN ROLLAND

fender of the humblest village churches against the Iconoclasts of Free-Thought, wrote at the same time: " These shells [which are striking the Cathedral of Rheims], at least, are not falling upon our battalions, upon our brothers and our sons, upon our defenders. May the wonders of the French genius perish, rather than the French genius itself! Let the most beautiful works of stone be destroyed, that the blood of my race may live! At this minute, I prefer the most humble and frail of the soldiers of France to our immortal masterpieces. We shall create other masterpieces. The blood of the French is fraught with an infinite series of perfections which aspire to be born, to blossom out. . . ." * There has been much irritating pose in the career of Maurice Barrès; but many of his sins will be forgiven, for the sake of words such as these, which ring true.

Once more, as at the time of the Dreyfus case, as in his would-be popular dramas, as in his biographies, as in *Jean-Christophe* itself, we feel obscurely the inner conflict between the heterogeneous elements in Romain Rolland's personality. Had he been able to fuse them

* L'Union Sacrée, September 21st.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

into a single whole, no living man would be greater than he. As it is, he is right rather than wrong, yet unable to assert the right joyously and convincingly. In the hour of decision, he points earnestly in all directions at once—too detached for a patriot, too much of a partisan for a sheer artist or an internationalist. He is Protean and inconsistent, the mere earthly shadow of the hero and sage he dreamed to be.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION : THE TWILIGHT
OF A WORLD?



CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION: THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD ?

§ 1. AFTER THE WAR: DECADENCE ?

Geniuses as cannon-fodder and survival of the unfittest.

" WHEN the midsummer sun set on the evening of Friday, July 31, 1914, it went down upon a world which passed away for ever with its setting." Thus President Nicholas Murray Butler,* voicing an opinion which, to the majority of his hearers, must have sounded like an eloquent truism. This assertion raises a problem which we must attempt to solve, if we would see the subject of the present book in its proper perspective. We have attempted to sketch the strivings and gropings, the dreams and despairs of a generation: will all that be swept away so soon into the gulf of the Great War? Did Anatole France, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget, Maurice Barrès, Romain Rolland, depict

* In an address before the Southern Sociological Congress, New Orleans, April, 1916.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

a world before the flood, which will soon seem alien and remote to us? We have tried to trace, in the works of five French writers, the influence of certain political events and of certain social conditions: if our method be valid, should we not be able to forecast, from the known facts of to-day, the character of the literature of to-morrow? Prophecy is a dangerous trade; but reasoned anticipation is the aim and test of science—a test from which history should not shrink.

At this point, we cannot help remembering the egregious, the tragi-comic failures of Guizot and Thiers. Thiers, a journalist, but also an historian, a financier and a statesman, keen-witted, practical, the embodiment of efficiency and common sense, declared: "The Parisians are crying for a railway to play with: let them have their toy! But it will never transport a single passenger or a pound of merchandise." Guizot, the lucid and profound expounder of the laws of civilization, asserted on the eve of 1848: "Universal suffrage is sheer madness; the day of universal suffrage will never come!" With these illustrious examples in mind, we are tempted to confess that history is no science in

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD ?

the strict sense of the term ; that “ explanations ” are merely convenient methods for grouping facts, pedagogical contrivances without any objective value ; that our flickering lamp can throw its light only backward ; and that, for all our searching, the secret of the future still lies on the knees of the gods.

It is in all humility, therefore, that we shall question the assertion so clearly made by President Butler, and discuss its special bearing on French literature.

Should the cataclysm of war spread to the great nations at present neutral, and proceed unimpeded for a number of years, then indeed a new era might dawn upon the world—an era of depression, of decadence, new Dark Ages spreading their gloom over several generations. The desolation of the once populous empires of the East, the degradation which accompanied and followed the downfall of Rome, the blight of Islam, France under Charles VI., Germany for a whole half-century after the peace of Westphalia, are examples in point. This war has already levied a toll unexampled in history : the losses of the belligerents in two years exceed

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

those suffered during the quarter of a century of Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. That all European nations will be racially the weaker for the sacrifice of their fittest men is incontrovertible: Novicow, Seeck, and particularly D. S. Jordan, have turned Darwinism into the most telling argument in favour of peace: war kills off the best of the breed, and works for the survival of the unfit.

But we must hasten to say that, under almost any conceivable circumstances, the ruin is not likely to be so universal and so thorough as permanently to affect the future of civilization. It was not so much organized warfare as the anarchy attendant on war—brigandage, famine, pestilence—that wrought irreparable havoc in the past. Germany, for instance, was scoured for thirty years by ferocious bands, until anthropophagy appeared again in the land. Instead of such lawlessness and reckless destruction, we see in all the nations engaged in the struggle an increase in efficiency and in thrift, a new spirit of solidarity and organization, which will go far to offset the actual waste of war. The area under fire represents but an infinitesimal percentage of the surface of the globe. Women

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD ?

and children, the guardians of the future, are reasonably safe: the massacre of a few of them causes a long shudder of indignation to run throughout the world. The heroic Serbian nation; the eternal martyr, Armenia; Poland, once the knight of Christendom, have bled profusely: but they are minor factors in the world of to-day. Much as they have suffered and are likely to suffer, Germany, England, Italy and France are not yet vitally affected.

Not yet: but what if the war should continue until all participants are actually exhausted? The infinite capacity of statesmen for criminal blundering must not be underrated; and the loyalty of a people may be wrought to such a point of fanatical stoicism that collective suicide would no longer be inconceivable. A world at bay might repeat the epic horrors of Saguntum, Jerusalem, and the Paris Commune. Nightmares of Armageddon and *Götterdämmerung* are haunting many mystic souls. I am inclined to view the situation in a less lurid and more reassuring light. The war will stop long before the great nations involved in it are hopelessly impoverished. The talk of fighting "to the last man and the last penny" is rhetoric. "At-

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

trition," if it comes to that, will have done its work as soon as it is seriously under way: at present the Central Empires still hope to force a decision or wear out the nerves of their opponents before the greater potentialities of the Allies have fully asserted themselves. As soon as they realize that these dreams are vain, the end will be near.

From our special point of view as students of literature, the present war is different from all others. Never before had the intellectual classes been so freely sacrificed as at present. The small professional armies of Louis XIV. and Frederick II. were composed mainly of the riff-raff of the population. Except during the last few years of the Empire, the well-to-do could buy themselves off; and it was not until after the war of 1870 that military service was made absolutely universal in France. This titanic struggle has not spared scientists, scholars, poets, and philosophers: side by side with humbler heroes, they have been used as cannon-fodder. It might be expected therefore that the baneful effect on the national intellect will be unexampled, even as the losses have been.

These losses are patent, irremediable: no

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

glorious peace will ever give back to France such men as Péguy, Psichari, Albert Thierry—three names picked at random, and symbolical of thousands. Yet such is the recuperative power of any healthy nation that it would not be safe to prophesy even a temporary decline in French literature. The men over forty-seven have not said their last word: Victor Hugo was fifty, and had published nothing for eight years, when he began the second and by far the greater half of his career. There will be geniuses in the generation now just reaching manhood. Women, before the war, were only beginning to assume their rightful place in literature. With the spread of education, the classes from which talents can be expected to spring are multiplying fast. Then “genius” often means “opportunity” and “recognition”: the thoughts diffused among the people, the things that we want to be said, and that we cannot say for ourselves, will finally find utterance, under the pressure of the *Zeitgeist*. Our dead heroes might have said them with more supreme felicity: but as there will be no means of measuring what we shall miss, we shall not be aware that we miss it at all. Furthermore, the wind

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

bloweth where it listeth, and we may have a glorious pleiad of poets to-morrow, in spite of all wars.

§ 2. REGENERATION ?

Greater earnestness—Precedents of the Religious Wars and the Revolution.

Some would say : because of the war.

This leads from the pessimistic to the optimistic hypothesis. War will not, in all probability, ruin France and lower the level of her literature: but will it have a regenerative influence? Can we descry a Promised Land beyond this sea of blood? It seems almost unthinkable that nations could go through the great ordeal unchastened. They are living on the heroic plane. Much of the dross in the collective soul must have been purged away in the crucible of war. It may be objected that, not once but several times before have such tragic experiences been followed by carnivals of frivolity. Thus the Restoration of Charles II., after the Rebellion and the rule of the Puritans; thus the Regency of the Duke of Orleans, after the sombre bigotry and the disasters which cast their gloom on the closing years of Louis XIV.;

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

thus Thermidor and the Directoire after the great Terror; thus, after the dread which had shaken the bourgeois world in 1848, the cynical levity and luxury of the Second Empire. But none of these cases is strictly parallel with present conditions. Then, in every instance, a large element in society, sometimes an actual majority of the people, had been repressed or tyrannized over by a handful of fanatics. A reaction was therefore inevitable. Now, all nations, and particularly France, are unanimous. There is no oppression by one party, by one class, by one sect: M. Poincaré is no Cromwell, no Louis XIV., no Robespierre. A mild form of reaction may be expected as soon as the nightmare is dispelled: but that readjustment to normal conditions may proceed so slowly as to be barely noticeable. Paris is not quite so Spartan to-day as it was in the tragic autumn of 1914. With the gradual restoration of confidence, and the protracted period of semi-official negotiations which may precede actual peace, France will, by an easy transition, become herself again.

I should not be surprised if it were then discovered that the old light-heartedness, even the

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

old flippancy, have not wholly disappeared. It is part of the French temperament to smile, not only as soon as danger is over, but in the thick of the fray. Apparent levity is not incompatible with heroism. Medieval epics tell us of the *gaberjes** of Charlemagne's peers. The courtiers of Louis XVI. remained exquisitely witty in prison and even on the steps of the guillotine. And the *poilus* in their trenches are keeping up the Gallic tradition of broad humour. France was deeply serious long before the present war. Indeed, only superficial or biassed critics had ever thought that the land of Descartes, Pascal, Bossuet, Buffon, Lamarck, Auguste Comte, Taine, Pasteur, was frivolous at heart. But France, like the painstaking scholar and profound philosopher Renan, took pride in masking with a smile her most laborious efforts. Joffre will not remain before posterity with an eternal frown. French self-irony will not die. But, to-morrow as yesterday, it will be misunderstood. To-morrow as yesterday, prudes, pedants, and Pharisees will be scandalized.

We should be careful not to ascribe to the war certain changes which had been under way

* Humorous bragging.

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD ?

for a decade before 1914. The France of to-morrow may be, and, I hope, will be, somewhat impatient of the laboured eroticism of Pierre Louÿs and Anatole France. But so was already the France of yesterday. The books of Agathon,* Dimnet,† Riou,‡ Rey,§ Lichtenberger,|| Romain Rolland,¶ leave no doubt as to this evolution. The new generation was less subtle, less artistic than its predecessor, but it was healthier. The Young Barbarian was already superseding the Æsthete as the ideal of educated youth. The war will simply accelerate this transformation: a consummation greatly to be desired.

Beyond that sobering effect, may we expect from the war a deeper regenerative influence on French literature? Twice before in the last four centuries had France gone through such a terrible ordeal: the Religious Wars and the Revolution. Twice has Armageddon been followed by a magnificent development of litera-

* *Les Jeunes Gens d'Aujourd'hui.*

† *France Herself Again* (composed mostly before the war).

‡ *Aux Écoutes de la France qui Vient.*

§ *Le Réveil de l'Orgueil Français.*

|| *Le Sang Nouveau.*

¶ *Jean-Christophe* (x.).

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

ture: the classical school in the seventeenth century, Romanticism in the nineteenth. Will a similar splendour crown this new Armageddon?

On closer scrutiny, we are led to wonder whether there was any direct connection between the two great literary revivals and the national crises which had preceded them. Classicism was full-grown at the time of the Renaissance, before Europe and France were torn asunder by religious strife. The essentials of Romanticism were already to be found in Rousseau: Saint-Preux is a Byronic hero. It might well be maintained that those two mighty storms had simply the result of deferring by half a century the normal development of literature.

Yet the Reformation reached the very depths of men's souls, and the Revolution changed the face of the world. The present war can hardly be expected to achieve so much. The most tragic thing about this conflict is that it is not waged in order to promote new ideals: so far at least as France is concerned, her one aim is to check a recrudescence of an ideal which she considers barbaric. This is not a missionary war,

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

but, spiritually as well as materially, one of sheer defence. Nay, the Germans too have worked themselves up into the belief that they are protecting their most sacred possessions against wanton aggression. No one, therefore, hopes to gain anything vital; no one indeed hopes to gain anything at all. No problem will be nearer its solution. A member of the community having run amuck and inflicted on the world incalculable damages, will be restrained: that is all. The display of physical energy, of moral endurance, of self-sacrificing devotion to a cause, is impressive enough, and cannot fail to have an educative value. But the gain will be offset by the growth of hatred, by the formidable obstacles accumulated in the path of world-co-operation. The nations will have profited little or nothing by their conquests and by their trials. So far as spiritual growth is concerned, these streams of pure blood have been poured in vain. For this war is waged on dead issues.*

* It may be noted in this connection that although the victories of 1864 and 1871 aroused great enthusiasm in the Northern States and in Germany, they absolutely failed to regenerate the American and German literatures.

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

It seems unduly paradoxical to reach the conclusion that such an upheaval will have trifling or negative results. But is it not the rule that bluster is no standard of creative activity? The slow ripening of the grain is an unobtrusive and commonplace process: yet it means infinitely more for the good of mankind than the most spectacular tornado. In the same way, some quiet scientist may be at this very moment winning a victory which will bless men's lives long after the epic slaughters of Tannenberg and Verdun are forgotten. We have yet to learn the lesson of the still, small voice.*

§ 3. UNITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE RESTORED. WHAT FRANCE MEANS TO THE WORLD.

1914, therefore, will not necessarily mean a new era in French literature any more than 1789 or 1870. Pseudo-classicism went on for nearly

* We need hardly say that this implies no disparagement of the heroism of the combatants, or any doubt as to the justice of their cause. It is a great pity that brave men should have to give up their lives in fighting the flames, and the true patriot is he who attempts to make conflagration impossible: but firemen are none the less entitled to our gratitude and admiration.

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

two generations after the first of these dates. The age illustrated and typified by Taine, Renan, Leconte de Lisle, Dumas Fils, Augier, Flaubert, the Goncourts, began about 1850 and did not come to an end until 1890. French literature will change, for such is the law of life; it will receive a new tinge from the war, for nothing human remains alien to it. But a revolution in art and thought as the result of military conflict is improbable.

Yet a merely negative result should not be scorned. We have attempted to show that the France of yesterday was suffering from two diseases: spiritual disunion and loss of self-confidence. These the present war may alleviate, and perhaps even cure.

It would be Utopian to expect the "Sacred Union" of all parties to outlive the period of hostilities. As soon as the foreign menace is removed, the French will be at their old game of springing at each other's throats in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Their one comfort will be that their English friends are likely to behave even worse. Yet there will be a difference. This is the first time since the Revolution, and perhaps the first time in history,

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

that France has stood as one block. The Convention had to fight the whole West and South in organized rebellion; whilst factions were sending each other to the guillotine. Napoleon found *émigrés* and *transfuges* at every step of his career, from the Royalists at Toulon and Philippeaux at St.-Jean-d'Acre to Bernadotte and Moreau in the campaign of 1813. The Bourbons were kings by the grace of the invaders; Louis-Philippe clung to his precarious throne for eighteen years amidst the irreconcilable hostility of Republicans and Legitimists; Napoleon III. shot his way to the throne, and was abandoned by his capital in the hour of most desperate need; Bazaine surrendered, because "the Empire overthrown, nothing was left." The moderates called Gambetta a "raving lunatic." Thiers gave the Bourgeois Republic her baptism of proletarian blood. There is not one ruler, not one statesman, not one hero, not even Lazare Carnot, the Organizer of Victory, not even Gambetta, the soul of National Defence, that has not been slandered and vilified by some sect or party. And this went on until July, 1914. Now for the first time, Catholics, Free-Thinkers, Protestants, and Jews; Royalists, Bonapartists,

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

Opportunists, and Radicals; capitalists and Socialists—all, Hervé with Barrès, Maurras with Briand, Du Paty de Clam with the son of Captain Dreyfus, all are standing together like a living wall. Henceforth the French will once more have a common tradition.

If the Allies are defeated—an eventuality which cannot lightly be dismissed—then all the fruit of this “ Sacred Union ” will be lost. Inevitably, the Nationalists will reproach the Socialists for having hampered the work of national preparedness; and the Socialists will reproach the Nationalists for a foolhardy and short-sighted policy which could lead to naught but war. Then we shall have a France more hopelessly divided against herself than before: a patriotism narrower, more feverish, more dolorous, dreaming hopelessly of a final “ Revanche ”; a peace party frankly antipatriotic, and advocating universal revolution. France and the French spirit will not die; but they will be, more than ever, morbid and embittered.

If, on the contrary, the Allies should win—and what loyal citizen of the world-Republic can fail to pray for their triumph?—then an enormous weight will be lifted from the French

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

soul. However small the margin of victory, however great the cost, the French will not grudge their sacrifices. It was not merely the sense of defeat that haunted them. It was the sense of cosmic injustice, the eternal problem of Job. Sins they had committed, confessed and atoned for; but they were also conscious of noble unselfish efforts requited with disaster, and worse still, with contumely. The undeserved contempt of a Pharisaic world was maddening. France, victorious, will have paid the full price, and will recover calm. Many dark hours she will have to live through. But her heart will no longer be assailed by self-doubt and anguish.

The French will have a common tradition: and that tradition will not be a dead thing, a self-made prison of vulgar pride, confining the free expansion of the national soul. It will be compatible with the highest, with the most visionary aspirations of their poets and prophets. France is fighting, not for territory, not for prestige, not even primarily for existence, but for international justice. She has called up the shades of Saint Louis, of Joan of Arc, of Napoleon: but it is in defence of a universal ideal.

THE TWILIGHT OF A WORLD?

She has found her soul, and the world sees it shining in her eyes.

I believe in the principles of democracy, of fraternal justice, of humanitarianism, for which France has stood in the past and stands to-day. I believe that it was a calamity, not for herself alone, but for mankind, when her star went down, for with it was obscured the faith of men in many a noble cause. We have witnessed, throughout the fifty years of the Bismarckian era, a revival of materialism, of superstition, and of ferocity. We have turned back from the fearless rationalism of our philosophers; we have jeered at the idealism of the generation of 1848. "Real-Politik" has prevailed, enforced by the threat of the mailed fist. Even England, even the United States, have toyed with the tempting fallacy that might is right. "Supremacy" was the avowed goal; and supremacy was measured in millions of square miles, in billions of foreign trade. With France herself again, hard-working, free of thought, loving peace and athirst for justice, the hearts of those who throughout the world are fighting against prejudices and privileges will beat more gladly. The trumpet call of Chanticleer will thrill once

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

more those who were suffering in darkness. May the successors of Anatole France, Loti, Bourget, Barrès, Rolland, more blessed than their elders, give us in their works the reflected glory of these infinite hopes !

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INDEX

The names of authors and historical characters are in small capitals.

The names of characters in fiction are in ordinary type.

The titles of books and periodicals are in italics.

- Abbé Constantin, 15, 16
 Abeille, 60
Above the Strife, 291-296
Action Française, 242
 Ada, 272
 ADAM, P., 21
Adolescence, 270-273
 AGATHON, 309
 AMADE, Gen. d', 127
Amethyst Ring, 101, 114-119
 AMIEL, F., 112, 189, 194, 219
Amori et Dolori Sacrum, 220
Amour, De l', 197
André Cornélis, 195
 Ange, Friar, 73
 Angelica, 117
 Anna (Braun), 283, 287
Antoinette, 279, 280
Antoinette (Jeannin), 285, 286, 287
Aphrodite, 71
Appeal to the Soldier, 223, 224
A Rebours, 221
 Arnaud, Mme., 287
As Strong as Death, 77
 Astarac, M. d', 73
 AUDOUX, Marguerite, 11, 22
 AUGIER, E., 313
 AUGUSTINE, St., 219
Aux Ecoutes de la France qui vient, 309
Azyadé, 146, 147, 152, 161, 166, 168
 BACON, 247
 Baillards, Brothers, 230-233
Balthazar, 66
 BALZAC, H. de, 17, 18, 103, 181, 191, 193, 197, 290
 BARBEY D'AUREVILLY, 180
 BARRÈS, M., 8, 9, 20, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 34, 94, 175, 176, 183, 194, 213-248, 290, 294, 295, 299, 315, 318
Barricade, 209, 210
 BAUDELAIRE, Ch., 14, 31, 189, 220
 BAYLE, 43, 45
 BAZAINE, 314
 BAZIN, R., 20, 21
 BEAUNIER, A., 22
 BECQUE, H., 29, 197
 BEETHOVEN, 263, 264, 273
Beethoven, Life of, 253, 258, 259, 286
 Bell, Miss V., 76
 Bereny, Countess Grazia, 281, 284, 285, 286
 Bergeret, Prof. L., 42, 51, 96, 102, 105, 106, 109, 111-114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 263
 Bergeret, Mme., 112, 113, 114, 116
 BERGSON, H., 41
 BERNADOTTE, 314
 BERTRAND, L., 22
 BEYLE, H., 193; cf. STENDHAL
Bluebeard, 132
Blood, Pleasure and Death, 220, 227
 Böig, the Great, 84, 85
 BOILEAU, 177
 BONALD, 180

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

- BONAPARTE, N., 180, 242; cf. Napoleon
 Bonmont, de, 115
 Bonnard, Sylvestre, 48, 51, 109; cf. *Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*
 BONNOT, 199
Book of My Friend, The, 44, 60-65, 75, 93, 119, 139
Book of Pity and Death, The, 162, 188
 BORDEAUX, H., 15, 20, 21
 BOSSUET, J. B., 178, 198, 215, 289, 308
 BOULANGER, Gen., 221-224
 BOURGES, Elémir, 5
 BOURGET, P., 8, 9, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 34, 46, 76, 77, 94, 153, 159, 167, 173-211, 215, 216, 218, 219, 242, 243, 299, 318
 Bouteiller, 225
 BRAHMS, 273, 274
 Braun, Dr., 282, 283
 Brécé, de, 115
 BRIAND, A., 105, 126, 207, 315
 Brotteaux des Islettes, 110, 130
 BRUNETIÈRE, F., 30, 67, 183, 189
 BUFFON, 59, 175, 308
 BURDEAU, 225
Burgraves, 181
 BURNS, R., 11
 BUTLER, N. M., 299, 301
 BUTLER, S., 125
 BYRON, 185
- Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, 259-263
 CAINE, Hall, 15
 CALVIN, 289
 CARLYLE, 82, 238
 CARNOT, L., 314
 Cartier de Chalmot, Gen., 104
 Casal, Raymond, 199
Castle of the Sleeping Beauty, 162
 Catherine the Lacemaker, 73, 96
 Cérès, 131
 CHARLEMAGNE, 308
- CHARLES II. (STUART), 306
 CHARLES VI., 301
 CHARLES IX., 205
 Charlot, Mgr., 105
 CHATEAUBRIAND, F. R. de, 24, 31, 45, 69, 108, 151, 164, 180, 185, 223
 Choulette, 76
 Chrysanthemum, 166; cf. *Madame Chrysanthemum*
 Clavier-Grandchamps, 204
 CLEMENCEAU, 126
 Coccoz, 57, 58
 Coignard, Jérôme, 42, 51, 72-73, 95, 96, 109, 130; cf. *Opinions of Jérôme Coignard*
 Colette (*Lies*), 196, 210, 215
Colette Baudoche, 8, 209, 227, 228, 230
Common Sailor, A, 149, 156
 COMTE, Aug., 181, 203, 308
 CONDÉ, 205
 CONDORCET, 181
 CONFUCIUS, 87
 CORELLI, Marie, 15
 CORNELLIE, P., 230
Contemporary History, 75, 101-121
Cracks in the House, 235
Crainquebille, Putois, Riquet, 132
Crime of Love, A, 195, 219
Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard, The, 42, 44, 56-60, 69, 75, 93, 211
 CROMWELL, 307
- DANTON, 242
Danton, 257
 DARWIN, 182
 DAUDET, A., 55
Daughter of Heaven, The, 143, 163
Dawn, 263-266
Death of Philoe, 162
Death-Throes of Turkey, 163
 Dechartre, 74, 75, 89
 DECOURCELLES, P., 15
Demi-Vierges, Les, 22

INDEX

- Demon of Mid-Day, The*, 209
 DESCARTES, R., 178, 247, 308
 DESCAYES, L., 21
Desert, The, 162
 Des Esseintes, 221
Desires of Jean Servien, The, 60, 109
Deux Gosses, Les, 15
Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques, 20
Diamond from the Sky, 17
 DICKENS, 208
 DIDEROT, 181
 Diener, Otto, 267, 268, 271, 287
 DIMNET, Abbé, 309
Disciple, The, 8, 46, 183, 191, 194, 195, 198-200
Disenchanted, The, 8, 159-161
Divorce, A, 209
 Djenane, 161
Drama of the Revolution, The, 257
Dressmaker's Form, The, 101, 111-114
 DREYFUS, 32, 99-101, 240, 253-255, 257, 260, 295, 315
 DRUDE, Gen., 127
 DRUMONT, E., 99
 DUBOIS, Card., 205
 DUMAS, A. Père, 17
 DUMAS, A. Fils, 313
 DUMAS, Dr. G., 69
 DUPANLOUP, Mgr., 54
 DU PATY DE CLAM, 315

Eastern Bastions, The, 227, 234
Ecclesiastes, 34, 95
 EDWARD VII., 40
 Ehrich, 227, 228
 ELIOT, G., 86
Elm on the Mall, The, 101-111
Emigré, L', 204
 ENNERY, D', 15
Erewhon, 125
Essays in Contemporary Psychology, 189
 ESTAUNIE, E., 5

Etape, L' (Probation Stage), 191, 204
Etui de Nacre, L', 66
 Euler, Amalia and Rosa, 270, 271
Eve of Battle, The, 22

Faces and Things that were Passing, 162
Fair on the Market Place, The, 277-279, 288
 FALLIÈRES, A., 205
 Falstaff, 73
Famille Cardinal, La, 16
 FARRERE, C., 22
 Fatou-Gaye, 146
 Figaro, 179
Figaro, Le, 101, 102, 106, 121
 FLAUBERT, G., 71, 103, 181, 193, 313
Flowers of Evil, The, 14, 220
 Fontanet, 53
For Our Churches, 243
Fourteenth of July, The, 247
France Herself Again, 309
 FRANCE, A., 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 20, 23, 24, 26, 29, 32, 33, 34, 39-134, 139, 141, 143, 167, 175, 183, 189, 215, 237, 290, 309, 318,
 FRANCIS, St., 266
 FRANCIS I., 205
 FREDERICK II., 304
Free Man, A, 217
Friends, The, 281
 FULLER, Margaret, 238
Future of Science, The, 182

Galilee, 162
 Gallio, 124, 125
 Gamelin, Evariste, 130
 Ganse, Mme., 64, 65
 Gaos, Yann, 152, 153
Garden of Berenice, The, 217, 219, 220, 222
Garden of Epicurus, The, 68, 94
 GARRISON, Wm. L., 293

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

- Gaulois, Le*, 102
 GAUTIER, Th., 31, 78, 164, 165, 190
 GERADE, Paul, 12
Gleams on the Sombre Road, 162
 Godet-Laterrasse, 55
Gods are Athirst, The, 129
Golden Age, The, 61
 GONCOURT, E. and J. de, 155, 313
Gospels (Zola's), 32
 Gottfried, Uncle, 266, 272, 285
 Goubin, M., 117
 GOURAUD, Gen., 127
 Gracieuse, 157
 GRAHAM, Kenneth, 61
Graziella, 148
Great Distress of the Churches of France, 224, 243
 Greslou, R., 195, 198, 199, 200
 Gromance, Mme. de, 104, 111, 115, 116
 Grüne, Heinrich der, 288
 GUILLAUMIN, II, 22
 Guitrel, Abbé, 54, 102, 106, 111, 115
 GUIZOT, 300
 GUYIESSE, Ch., 260

 HALÉVY, Daniel, 126, 260
 HALÉVY, Ludovic, 15
 Hamilton (Sylvain Kohn), 278
Hamlet, 195
Handel, 253
 Hassler, 274
 HEINE, H., 217
Hellé, 22
 HENRY III., 205
 HENRY IV., 140
 HERVÉ, G., 133, 315
Histoire Comique, 132
History of Four Years, 126
 HOLBACH, 182
 Homais, 181, 184
House of Sin, The, 22
 HUGO, V., 17, 32, 133, 161, 164, 180, 181, 243, 290, 292, 305
 HUXLEY, J. S., 130
 HUYSMANS, J. K., 221

Iceland Fisherman, The, 93, 142, 149, 151-153, 168, 211
India (without the English), 138, 162
Inspired Hill, The, 230-234
Intellectual and Moral Reformation of France, 182
In the German Service, 227
In the House, 280, 288

 Jacqueline, 281, 287
 JAMES, Wm., 53
Japan in Autumn, 155
 JAURÈS, J., 32, 40, 123, 242
Jean-Christophe, 23, 251-296, 309
 Jeanne Alexandre, 58, 59
 Jeannin, Olivier, 279, 280, 281, 282, 284
Jerusalem, 162
Jeunes Gens d'Aujourd'hui, Les, 309
 JOAN OF ARC, 242, 316
Joan of Arc, Life of, 51, 127-128
Jocaste, 55, 60
 JOFFRE, Gen., 308
 JORDAN, D. S., 302
Judith Renaudin, 162

 KANT, I., 225, 247, 248
 KELLER, Gottfried, 288
 Kerich, Josepha von, 268, 269, 270, 271
 Kerich, Minna von, 268, 269
 Krafft, Jean-Christophe, 251-296
 Krafft, Jean-Michel, 264, 265, 266, 267
 Krafft, Louisa, 265, 266
 Krafft, Melchior, 264, 265, 266, 267, 270
 Kohn, Sylvain (Hamilton), 278
 KRUPP, 123

 Lacarelle, M., 237
Ladies' Home Journal, 15
Lady in White, 63

INDEX

- LAMARCK, 308
 LAMARTINE, 148, 180, 181
 LAMENNAIS, 32, 180, 231
 Lantaigne, Abbé, 54, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 110, 111, 113, 115,
 116
 Larcher, C., 196, 198, 219
Last Days of Peking, 162
 LAVOISIER, 186, 187
Lay Down Your Arms ! 208
Lean Cat, The, 55
 LECONTE DE LISLE, 313
 LEMAÎTRE, J., 46, 76, 189, 242
 LEMERRE, A., 54
 Le Mesnil, 74, 89
 LEROUX, P., 32
 Lhéry, A., 160, 161
 LICHTENBERGER, 309
Lies, 191, 196, 198, 210, 219
 LITTRÉ, 198
 Longuemare, Father de, 130
Lorna Doone, 192
 LOTI, P., 8, 9, 20, 23, 24, 26, 29,
 31, 34, 74, 93, 103, 135-171,
 190, 290, 299, 318
 LOUBET, E., 205
 LOUIS IX., 85, 206, 316
 LOUIS X., 244
 LOUIS XIV., 177, 178, 206, 242,
 304, 306, 307
 LOUIS XV., 205
 LOUIS XVI., 308
 LOUIS-PHILIPPE, 16, 314
 LOÜYS, P., 5, 32, 71, 309
 Loyer, 116
 LOYOLA, St. Ignatius, 217, 219
 LYAUTEY, Gen., 127

Madame Bovary, 103, 181
Madame Butterfly, 147
Madame Chrysanthemum, 146,
 147, 148, 154, 155
 Maël, St., 130, 131
 MAINDRON, M., 22
 MAISTRE, J. de, 180
 MALEBRANCHE, 178
 MALLARMÉ, 127

 MANGIN, Gen., 217
Manon Lescaut, 72
 MARGUERITTE, P. and V., 21
Marie-Claire, 22
 Marneffe, Valérie, 196
 Martin-Bellême, Thérèse, 74, 75,
 89
 MARX, K., 24, 32
 MAUPASSANT, G. de, 23, 66, 77
 MAURRAS, Ch., 30, 183, 203, 216,
 242, 243, 315
 MAZARIN, Card., 205
 Mazure, 104
 McKAYE, Percy, 257
*Meine Beobachtungen und Erleb-
 nisse als Dorfpastor*, 12
 MENDELSSOHN, 273
 Ménétrier, Jacques, 71
 Mevel, Gaud, 152, 153
 MEUNG, Jehan de, 244
 MICHAEL-ANGELO, 276, 287
Michael-Angelo, Life of, 258,
 259
 MICHELET, J., 32, 180, 241, 256,
 257, 292
 MILLE, Pierre, 22
 MILLERAND, 126, 207
 Minna, 287
 MIRBEAU, O., 21, 193
Misérables, Les, 18
 Moan, Granny and Sylvestre,
 153
 MOLIÈRE, 80
 Monneron, the, 191
 Monneron, Julie, 204
Monsieur Bergeret in Paris, 101,
 119-121
 MONTAIGNE, 67, 73, 80, 95
 MONTÉPIN, X. de, 15
 Moraines, Suzanne, 196, 210,
 215
 MOREAU, Gen., 314
 MORICE, Ch., 94
Morning, 267-270
Morocco, 161
 MOSELLY, 22
 MOSES, 81

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

- MULLER, Ottfried, 118
Musicians of To-day, 253
Musicians of Yesterday, 253
My Brother Yves, 149, 151
- NAPOLEON, I., 131, 183, 258, 314, 316
 NAPOLEON III., 181, 314
 Nayrac, 219
 Newcome, Col., 60
 NEWTON, 186, 187
Ninety-three, 18
 NOAILLES, Countess M. de, 22
 NONOTTE, 207
Notre-Dame, 18, 161
 NOVICOW, 302
 Nozière, Dr. and Pierre, 60
- OHNET, G., 15
On the Glorious Path, 134
On the White Stone, 124
Opinions of Jérôme Coignard, 45, 73, 78, 102
Oriental Phantom, 147
Origin of Species, 182
Origins of the Modern Lyrical Drama, 253
 Otto (Diener), 267, 268, 271, 287
Outre-Mer, 190
- Pages Libres*, 260
 Panneton de la Barge, 119
 Paphnutius, 68, 69
Paris as a Musical Centre, 253
Parisian Life, 197
 PASCAL, B., 34, 169, 256, 308
 Pascuala Ivanowitch, 146
 PASTEUR, L., 308
 PATOUILLET, 207
 PAUL, St., 125
 "Peerless Leader": W. J. BRYAN, 40
 PÉGUY, Ch., 260, 262, 305
 PÉLADAN, Sar J., 217
Penguin Island, 47, 75, 129, 130-132
- Perils of Pauline*, 17
Petit Journal, 14
Petit Parisien, 14
Petit Pierre, Le, 65
 PHELIPPEAUX, 314
 PHILIP the Fair, 206
Physiology of Modern Love, 176, 196, 197, 219
Physiologie du Mariage, 197
 Piedagnel, Firmin, 108-111
 Pied d'Alouette, 104
Pierre Nozière, 65
 PILATE, 34
Pilgrimage to Angkor, 162, 169
 PLUTARCH, 258
 POINCARÉ, R., 85, 205, 307
 POMPADOUR, Mme. de, 116, 205
 Pouilly the Lexicographer, 112
 PRÉVOST, Abbé, 72
 PRÉVOST, Marcel, 22
Probation Stage (L'Etape), 210
Procurator of Judæa, 125
Promised Land, 195, 219
 PROUDHON, 32
 PSICHARI, J., 305
Puits de Sainte Claire, Le (St. Clara's Well), 66, 76
- Querne, de, 219
 QUINET, Edgar, 292
- RABELAIS, 55, 80
 RACINE, 193, 230, 239
Ramuntcho, 157, 158, 162
 Rarahu, 74, 146, 152, 162, 166, 168
Rebel, The, 22
Rebellion, 273-276
Red and Black, 195
Red Lily, The, 8, 46, 68, 74, 77-90, 94
Reflections on the French Revolution, 180
 REGENT, 205, 306
 RENAN, E., 24, 30, 31, 32, 43, 44, 45, 54, 69, 95, 108, 182, 201, 240, 292, 308, 313

INDEX

- Réveil de l'Orgueil Français, Le*, 309
Revolt of the Angels, The, 132
Revue de Paris, 65
 REY, 309
 RICHEPIN, J., 215
 RIOU, 309
 Riquet, 117-119
Robert Elsmere, 208
 ROBESPIERRE, 84, 307
 RODIN, A., 41, 276
 ROHAN, Card. de, 205
 ROLLAND, R., 9, 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, 33, 34, 133, 249-296, 299, 309, 318
Romance of a Child, The, 139
Romance of National Energy, The, 224, 225, 234
Roman de la Rose, 244
 ROOSEVELT, Th., 40
 ROSNY, J.-H., 21
Rôtisserie of Queen Pédauque, The, 68, 71-74, 75, 76, 77, 93, 115
Rougon-Macquart, Les, 93
 Roupert, 121, 122
 ROUSSEAU, J.-J., 86, 164, 181, 206, 310
 Roux, M., 113
 Rumesnil, de, 204

 Sabine, 271, 272, 285, 287
Saint Clara's Well, 66, 76
 SAINTE-BEUVE, 43, 67
 ST.-PIERRE, Bernardin de, 164
 St.-Preux, 310
 SAINT-SIMON, 223
Salammbô, 18
 SAND, George, 17, 32
Sang Nouveau, Le, 309
Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism, 224
 SCHNEIDER, 123
 SCHUBERT, 273
 Schultz, Dr. Peter, 275, 286, 287
 SCHUMANN, 273
 SEECK, 302

 SEMBAT, M., 207
Sense of Death, The, 22, 210
 SHAKESPEARE, 16, 195, 239, 256
 SIÉYÈS, 179
 SIMON, Jules, 221, 222
 Sixte, Adrien, 191, 198, 199, 200
 SOCRATES, 82
Spahi's Romance, 146
 SPENCER, H., 199, 243
 SPINOZA, 198
 STENDHAL, 189, 193, 194, 217
 Suleima, 146
 SULLY-PRUDHOMME, 189

 Taconet, Abbé, 198
 TAINE, H., 30, 165, 182, 190, 197, 198, 199, 203, 225, 243, 308, 313
Tales of Jacquot Tournegbroche, 132
 TALLEYRAND, 205
 Telemachus, Gen., 55
Temps, Le, 127
Temptation of St. Anthony, 71
 Terremondre, M. de, 104
 Teutobochus, 51
Thais, 45, 68-71, 76, 93
 THALAMAS, 127
 THARAUD, J. and J., 22
Their Faces, 223, 224
 THIBAUT, J. A., 48, 50, 139; cf. Anatole France
 THIBAUT (A. France's father), 50, 61
 THIERRY, Albert, 262, 305
 THIERS, A., 300, 314
Third Youth of Madame Plum, 155
Three Musketeers, 18
Through the Gate of Horn and the Gate of Ivory, 125
Time-Machine, The, 125
 TOLSTOY, 256, 266, 290, 293
Tolstoy, Life of, 258, 259
 TORQUEMADA, 84, 199
Toute Licence Sauf Contre l'Amour, 218

FIVE MASTERS OF FRENCH ROMANCE

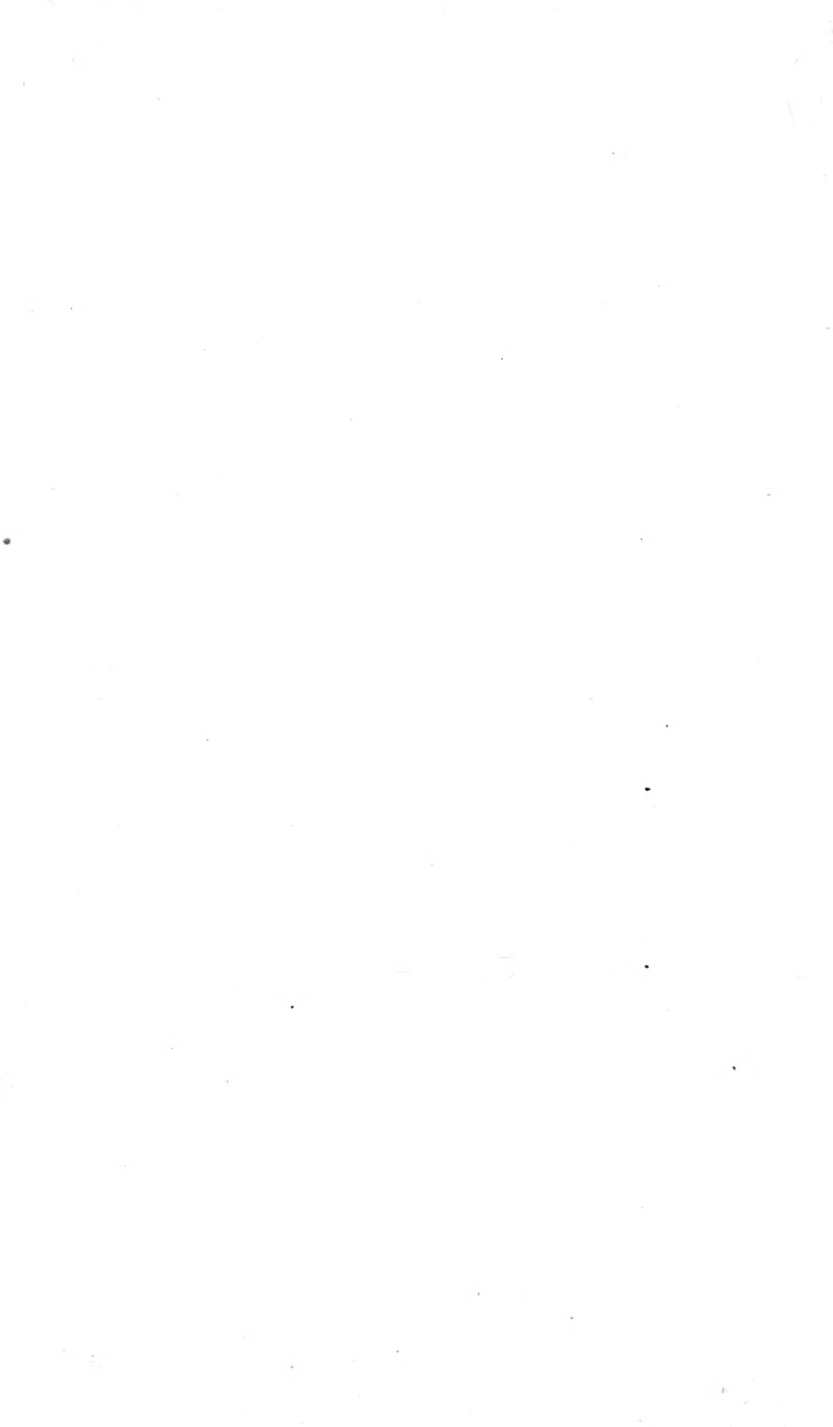
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|--|---|
| <p> <i>Towards a Better Age</i>, 124
 <i>Towards Ispahan</i>, 161
 <i>Tragedies of Faith, The</i>, 257
 <i>Trepof, Prince and Princess</i>, 57, 58
 <i>Tribune, The</i>, 209
 <i>Trinco</i>, 131
 <i>TURGENIEV</i>, 189
 <i>Two Little Vagabonds</i>, 15
 <i>TYNAIRE, M.</i>, 22

 <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>, 208
 <i>Under the Eyes of the Barbarians</i>, 194, 217, 226
 <i>Union Sacrée, L'</i>, 295
 <i>Uprooted, The</i>, 224

 <i>VACHEROT</i>, 198
 <i>Vence, Paul</i>, 76
 <i>Vergilius Nauticus</i>, 113
 <i>VERLAINE, P.</i>, 76
 <i>VIAUD, J.</i>, 139, 145; cf. <i>LOTI, P.</i>
 <i>VICKERS-MAXIM</i>, 123 </p> | <p> <i>VIGNY, A. de</i>, 34, 54, 169, 181
 <i>Vinci, René</i>, 191
 <i>Vintras</i>, 231
 <i>Visire</i>, 131
 <i>VIVIANI</i>, 126, 207
 <i>VOLTAIRE</i>, 4, 24, 30, 43, 45, 54, 55, 73, 80, 85, 86, 111, 116, 181, 182, 205, 206, 207, 241, 243, 289

 <i>WAGNER, R.</i>, 248, 273
 <i>WELLS, H. G.</i>, 21, 78, 125, 187
 <i>When the Sleeper Wakes</i>, 126
 <i>WILLY, Colette</i>, 22
 <i>WOLF, Hugo</i>, 274
 <i>Wolves, The</i>, 257
 <i>Work</i>, 32
 <i>Worms-Clavelin</i>, 104
 <i>WRIGHT, Harold Bell</i>, 6

 <i>ZOLA, Emile</i>, 8, 10, 18, 21, 29, 32, 55, 93, 122, 150, 184, 198 </p> |
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